Soviet Literature

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EMMANUIL KAZAKEVICH

THE STAR

CHAPTER I

The advancing division plunged into boundless forests, and the forests swallowed it.

What German tanks, German aircraft and bandit gangs ranging the district had failed to achieve was accomplished by these endless thickets, their roads ruined by war, washed away by the spring rains, sticky with mud. Lorries with food and ammunition got stuck in the distant forest outskirts. Ambulances were held up in isolated forest hamlets. The guns of the artillery regiment, left without petrol, were scattered along the banks of nameless streams. With every hour the distance separating the equipment from the infantry became alarmingly greater. But the troops nevertheless continued to advance stubbornly, dividing their rations and grudging every cartridge. At last they too began to slow down. Their drive became weaker, less confident, and the Germans, taking advantage of it, slipped away from their blows and hastily retreated westward.

The enemy had vanished.

The infantry, even without anybody to fight, kept doing its job, occupying the territory which had been gained. But there is no sight more forlorn than scouts out of contact with the enemy. The object of their existence gone, they tramp along the side of the road like a body divest of its soul.

The divisional commander, Colonel Serbichenko, overtook one such group in his jeep. He climbed slowly out of the machine and stood in the middle of the muddy road, hands on hips, smiling mockingly. The scouts, seeing their commander, halted.

"Well, lost the enemy, eh, my eagles?" he said. "Where's the enemy, what's he doing?"

He recognized Lieutenant Travkin leading the men—Colonel Serbichenko knew all his officers by sight—and shook his head reproachfully.

"And you, Travkin?" he said, and continued acidly: "What you might call a pleasant little war—drinking milk in the villages and visiting the girls... This way, with you around, we'll get to Germany and never even see the enemy... That would be grand, wouldn't it?" he asked with unexpected gaiety.

Lieutenant-Colonel Galiev, the divisional chief of staff who was in the jeep, smiled wearily, surprised at the sudden change in the colonel's mood. A moment before Serbichenko had been giving him a merciless dressing down for inactivity and Galiev was sitting silent, crushed.

It was the sight of the scouts that had wrought the change in the colonel. He had begun his own army life in 1915 as an infantry scout. In the reconnaissance service he received his baptism of fire and gained the St. George Cross, and he always retained a soft spot for the scouts. The very sight of their green camouflage overalls and sunburned faces never failed to gladden his heart. They would go along the side of the road in single file, ready at any moment to disappear, to merge with the silent forest, with the uneven ground, with the flickering shadows of dusk.

But the divisional commander's reproof was a serious one. To lose the enemy, or in the language of the regulations, to let him disengage—this was a black mark for the scouts, almost a disgrace.

One could sense in the colonel's words his profound anxiety over the fate of his division. He feared a meeting with the enemy because his forces were thinned out and the rear services were lagging. But at the same time he wanted to get at that illusive foe at last, to come to grips with him, to find out what he wanted, what he could do. Yes, and for that matter, it was about time to halt for a while, to put his men and materiel

into good shape. Of course, he would not care to admit even to himself that his wishes were contrary to the passionate driving urge of the whole country but, nevertheless, he dreamed of the offensive stopping. Such are the secrets of the profession.

The scouts stood there in silence, shifting from foot to foot, looking rather sheepish.

"Here they are—your eyes and ears," said the divisional commander scornfully to his chief of staff, as he climbed into the car again. The jeep moved on.

The scouts stood there for another minute; then the lieutenant slowly moved on and the others followed him.

His ears habitually attuned to every rustle, Travkin thought about his platoon. Like his commander he both desired and feared a meeting with the enemy. He wanted it because it was his duty, and because these days of compulsory idleness had a bad effect on his men, clogging them with the dangerous spiderweb of carelessness, idleness. He feared the meeting because out of the eighteen men with whom he had begun the offensive only eleven were left. True, they included Anikanov who was famous throughout the division, the fearless Marchenko, the devil-may-care Mamochkin and the experienced old scouts Brazhnikov and Bykov. The remainder were for the most part infantrymen sent in from the units during the offensive. So far they were finding it very pleasant to be in reconnaissance, to walk in single file in small groups, enjoying a freedom unknown to the infantry units. They were surrounded with admiration and respect, which was very flattering, and they looked grand, but how much good they would be when it came to serious business—that remained to be seen.

Now Travkin realized that it was just this which had slowed his pace. He was stung by the commander's reproof, especially as he knew Serbichenko's weakness for reconnaissance. He caught in the colonel's green eyes the look of the sly, old, experienced scout of the previous war, of Corporal Serbichenko who seemed to be challenging him: "Well, let's see how you, young ones, measure up to an old hand."

Meanwhile, the platoon had entered a village, typical of Western Ukraine, with scattered homesteads surrounded by fields and orchards. A crucified Jesus looked down at them from an enormous cross, the height of three men. The streets were empty, and only the barking of dogs and the barely perceptible movements of the home-woven curtains showed that the villagers, terrorized by bandit gangs, were cautiously examining the soldiers entering their village.

Travkin led his group to a lonely cottage on a rise. An old woman opened the door. She drove back a large dog and slowly took in the soldiers with deep-set eyes overhung by thick grey brows.

"Good day," said Travkin. "We've come here to rest up for an hour or so."

The scouts followed her into a clean room with a painted floor and numerous icons. They had already noticed that the icons in these parts were different from those in Russia—there were no embossed metal coverings and the saints' faces were unpleasantly sweet and pretty. As for the old woman herself, she was exactly like any Ukrainian granny from the Kiev or Chernigov districts, with innumerable homespun skirts and dry, veined arms, differing from them only in the ill-tempered expression of her piercing eyes.

However, despite her grim, almost hostile silence, she gave the soldiers fresh bread and milk as rich as cream, pickled cucumbers and a panful of potatoes. But she gave it in such a morose, unfriendly manner that the food stuck in their throats.

"Here's a bandit mother for you!" growled one of the scouts.

He was half-way right. The woman's youngest son actually was with the bandits in the forests while the older one was with the partisans. And while the bandit's mother preserved a hostile silence, the mother of the partisan hospitably opened her door to the soldiers. After giving them some fried pork and a jug of *kvass*, the partisan-mother gave place to the bandit-mother who seated herself in gloomy silence by the loom which occupied half the room.

Sergeant Anikanov, a calm, broad-faced man with small, all-seeing eyes, asked her:

"Why are you silent, Granny, or have you lost your tongue? Come and sit down and talk to us."

Sergeant Mamochkin—stooping, thin and nervous—said mockingly:

"There's a ladies' man for you! Ready for a chat even with an old woman! . . ."

Travkin, deep in his own thoughts, went outside the cottage and stood by the porch. The village was dozing. Hobbled horses were cropping on a slope. A deep silence reigned—the silence of a village which has known the swift passage of two enemy armies.

"Our lieutenant is worried," said Anikanov when Travkin left. "What was it the colonel said?—A pleasant little war, drinking milk in the villages and visiting the girls?"

"What the divisional commander said is his own business," seethed Mamochkin suddenly. "Why d'ye want to put your oar in? If you don't want the milk, don't drink it, there's water in the tub. It's none of your business, it's the lieutenant's. He's responsible to headquarters. Who d'ye think you are? Just a country lout. If I'd got hold of you in Kerch, I'd have stripped you and given you to the fishes for dinner in five minutes."

Anikanov laughed good-naturedly.

"Maybe so. Stripping folks—you're good at that. And fine with dinners, too. That's just what the colonel was saying."

"So what?" Mamochkin flared, stung as always by Anikanov's calm. "What's wrong with having dinner? A good scout with a head on him feeds better than a general. Folks are braver and cleverer on good food. Get that?"

Red-cheeked, flaxen-haired Brazhnikov, round-faced, freckled Bykov, the seventeen-year-old Yura Golubovsky, tall handsome Feoktistov and the rest listened smiling to Mamochkin's hot-headed southern outburst and Anikanov's calm, measured words. Only Marchenko—broad-shouldered, dark, with gleaming teeth—stood beside the old woman at the loom, watching her small, dry hands, and repeating with the surprise of a townsman:

"But it's a real factory!"

In all the disputes between Mamochkin and Anikanov, jesting or angry, on any theme—whether Kerch herrings were better than Irkutsk bass, about the comparative qualities of German and Soviet tommy guns, whether Hitler was mad or just a villain, when the second front would open—Mamochkin was always the aggressor, while Anikanov, his sagacious little eyes gleaming slyly, would defend his position calmly but bitingly, driving his opponent to fury by his placidity.

Mamochkin, excitable and high-strung, was exasperated by Anikanov's stolidity and good humour. And Mamochkin's irritation was mingled with a secret envy. Anikanov had been decorated with an Order, while he had only a medal; the commander treated Anikanov almost as an equal, and himself like almost any other man. All this hurt Mamochkin. He consoled himself with the idea that Anikanov was a member of the Communist Party, and therefore was more trusted, but secretly he, too, could not help admiring the scout's cool courage. Mamochkin's own daring was to a great extent a pose, needing constant stimulation by his own vanity and he realized this too. He certainly was vain but his reputation of a good scout was well earned. He had taken part in many a splendid exploit, but it was Anikanov who starred in all of them.

Between the battles, however, Mamochkin would steal the show. Young scouts who had not yet been on a real job admired him greatly. He swaggered about in smart riding breeches and in yellow boots made of the finest leather. His tunic collar was always unfastened and a lock of black hair hung over his forehead from beneath a Kuban cap with its bright-green top. What comparison could there be between him and the massive, broad-shouldered, simple Anikanov.

Each one's life before the war had left its imprint upon his character—the Siberian collective farmer Anikanov's grasp of things, the resourcefulness and exact calculation of the metal worker Marchenko, the recklessness of the longshoreman Mamochkin. But the past already seemed unutterably distant. With no idea how long the war would last they had plunged right into it. War had become their life and the platoon their only family.

Family! It was a strange family whose members did not stick together for very long. One would go to hospital, another—still further, to that bourne from which there is no return. It had its own short but colourful history, passed on from generation to generation. Somebody would recall how Anikanov first came to

the platoon. It took a long time before he was allowed on patrol—none of the seniors wanted to have him with them. True, the Siberian's tremendous physical strength was a great advantage. In a hand-to-hand scrap he could easily scoop out and choke two, if necessary. But Anikanov was so huge, so heavy that the scouts were afraid of what would happen if he were killed or wounded—how could they ever carry him away? In vain did he plead that if he were wounded he'd get away himself, and if he were killed: "To hell with it, leave me, what can the Germans do to me when I'm dead already?" And it was only recently, when Lieutenant Travkin took over command, after Lieutenant Skvortsov had been wounded, that things changed.

Travkin took Anikanov with him on his first patrol. And "that giant" scooped up a big German so neatly that the other scouts barely had time to gasp. He worked swiftly and silently like a great cat. Even Travkin found it hard to believe that there was a half-choked German struggling in Anikanov's waterproof cape—a "tongue", the division's dream for the past fortnight. One evening Anikanov and Sergeant Marchenko captured a German captain. But Marchenko got wounded in the leg, so that Anikanov had to carry both him and the German, gently clasping his comrade and the enemy together, fearing in equal measure to injure either of them.

Stories about the exploits of old scouts were the main theme of long night talks, stimulating the imagination of the new men and filling them with pride in their job. Now, in this period of prolonged inactivity, far from the enemy, the scouts were getting slack.

After the good meal and a smoke Mamochkin began talking of spending the night in the village and getting some vodka.

"M'yes, nothing much to hurry for..." said Marchenko uncertainly. "We won't catch them anyway. Jerry's making a good sprint for it."

At that moment the door opened to admit Travkin.

"Granny, whose are those horses?" he asked, pointing to the hobbled beasts.

One of them, a big sorrel with a white star on its forehead, belonged to the old woman, the others to neighbours. Twenty minutes later these neighbours had been summoned to the old woman's cottage and Travkin, hastily scribbling a receipt, was saying:

"Send one of your lads with us, if you like, he'll bring the horses back."

This suggestion pleased the peasants. Every one of them knew well enough that it was only the swift advance of the army which had prevented the Germans from driving off all the stock and burning the village. They raised no objections to Travkin's proposal and immediately chose a boy to go with the platoon. The sixteen-year-old lad in a sheepskin coat was both proud and scared at this sudden responsibility. He unfastened the horses, bridled them, watered them at the well and announced that they were ready.

A few minutes later twelve riders were galloping westward. Anikanov rode up to Travkin and nodding toward the boy asked softly:

"Aren't you going to get it in the neck for this requisition, Comrade Lieutenant?"

"M'yes, maybe we shall," Travkin replied thoughtfully. "But we'll catch up with the Germans."

They exchanged understanding smiles.

As he urged on his horse, Travkin examined the silent distances of the ancient forest. The wind was in his face and the horses seemed to fly like birds. In the west the sky glowed like blood and the riders seemed to be pursuing it as they raced forward.

CHAPTER II

Divisional headquarters camped for the night in a large forest among the restlessly sleeping soldiers. No fires were lighted—German aircraft were humming high overhead incessantly, looking for passing troops. The sappers had gone on in advance and worked for the whole afternoon, building this lovely town of green huts with straight streets, signposts and neat shelters covered with pine branches. How many such short-lived "towns" the divisional sappers had built during these war years!

Lieutenant Bugorkov, in command of a sapper company, was waiting for the chief of staff to talk to him. The lieutenant-colonel kept his eyes glued to the map. The green surface with the positions of the units entered upon it looked very strange. The usual blue pencil lines

showing the enemy positions were absent. And heaven alone knew where the rear services were. The regiments were dangerously alone in the boundless forest.

The woods where the division had camped for the night had the shape of a question mark. And it seemed to be asking of Lieutenant-Colonel Galiev in the commander's mocking voice: "Well, how about it? This isn't the northwestern front where you sat on your tails for half the war and German artillery kept firing at regular hours! This is a war of manóeuvre!"

Galiev who hadn't had a good night's sleep for a long while was huddled in his Caucasian cloak. At last he raised his eyes from the map and saw Bugorkov.

"What is it?"

Lieutenant Bugorkov was taking in with satisfaction the hut his men had built.

"I've come to find out where headquarters is to be tomorrow, Comrade Lieutenant-Colonel," he replied. "I'll send a platoon there at dawn."

He would very much have liked the division to stay in these woods, even if just for one more day. If only they could remain for a little while in this pleasant town of forest huts, yes, and say a few words of praise to Bugorkov for this marvel of town-building. Bugorkov was the son of master carpenters and stonemasons, and the pride of a handicraftsman demanded satisfaction.

"Give me your map," said the lieutenant-colonel curtly. And he marked a small flag—on a rise in another forest, some forty kilometres from the present halt. Bugorkov smothered a sigh and turned towards the door but at that moment the waterproof cape closing the entrance was pushed aside and Captain Barashkin, in charge of reconnaissance, entered the hut. Lieutenant-Colonel Galiev gave him an acid welcome:

"The divisional commander is not satisfied with our reconnaissance. Today we met Lieutenant Travkin and his men. Their appearance was a disgrace. Untidy, unshaven. It's your business!..."

The lieutenant-colonel was silent for a moment, then suddenly shouted in a desperate voice:

"And will you inform me, captain, at last—where is the enemy?"

Lieutenant Bugorkov slipped out of the hut and went to prepare a sapper platoon for the coming advance. He decided to find Travkin on the way and tell him what he had heard. "He'd better hurry and get his men shaved, and their hair trimmed," thought Bugorkov goodnaturedly, "otherwise, he's going to get it in the neck."

Bugorkov liked Travkin who came from his parts—the Volga district. Although he was now a famous scout, Travkin was still the same quiet, modest fellow he had been the first time they met. True, they saw each other seldom—each one had plenty to keep him busy—but it was pleasant to be able to think that his friend Volodya Travkin was marching somewhere near—modest, serious Travkin, always in sight of death, nearer to it than anyone else....

Bugorkov could not find Travkin. He peeped into Barashkin's hut, but the latter was still upset by the reception he had been given and answered Bugorkov's question with a volley of curses.

"The devil alone knows where he is! Getting me in trouble...."

Captain Barashkin was famous in the division for his foul tongue and his laziness. Realizing that headquarters had little use for him and expecting to be transferred any day, he had stopped doing anything at all. Throughout the offensive he had had only the vaguest idea where his scouts were and what they were doing. He himself travelled in the headquarters' lorry and flirted with the newly arrived radio operator Katya, a fair-haired, dreamy girl-soldier with lovely eyes.

Bugorkov left Barashkin and found himself in the middle of this human nest that would be so short-lived. As he strolled along the straight path, he was thinking how grand it would be if the war ended at last and he could go back home, and do his job once more—build new houses, breathe the fragrance of planed boards, climb scaffolds and discuss blueprints with the bearded master carpenter.

At dawn Bugorkov loaded spades, picks and other tools onto a cart and set off at the head of his sappers.

The first noisy birds were fluttering about in the forest through ancient trees whose tops met over the path. Along the ditches shivering sentries were returning from the night watch, their waterproof capes flung over their greatcoats. Around

the camp and along the road trenches had been dug where sleepy machine gunners stood by their weapons. The soldiers were sleeping on spruce branches spread over the ground, huddled close to one another. The morning chill had wakened them, and they were getting up to gather pine cones and branches for campfires.

"That's war," thought Bugorkov, shivering with cold. "A homeless life for hundreds and thousands of people."

After ten kilometres the sappers saw three horsemen coming swiftly from the west. Bugorkov was alarmed; he knew that there was not a single Soviet soldier ahead. The riders approached at a gallop, and soon Bugorkov with great relief recognized one of them as Travkin.

"The Germans are not far off, with artillery and mobile guns," said Travkin, without dismounting.

He traced the German defences on Bugorkov's map—they ran right through the forest where the next day's town of huts was to have been erected.

"And two German armoured cars and mobile guns are standing here, probably in ambush... Right there," Travkin concluded, and added: "Anikanov's been wounded in a scrap with the Germans."

Anikanov was sitting his horse awkwardly, smiling apologetically, as though he had caused everybody great trouble through some carelessness.

Bugorkov was at a loss.

"What am I to do now?" he asked.

They agreed that the sappers would wait where they were. Travkin would report, and then give Bugorkov instructions from headquarters. Travkin flicked his big sorrel with the white star on its forehead and galloped on.

Colonel Serbichenko was standing beside his jeep, surrounded by regimental commanders, lieutenant-colonels and majors, with adjutants and orderlies at a little distance. Travkin reined his horse up sharply, slipped to the ground and limping a little after the unaccustomed long ride, made his way to the colonel.

"Comrade Divisional Commander, the Germans are near."

All crowded round him while he reported briefly. The enemy had entrenched along the bank of a nearby stream. He had seen artillery positions and six mobile guns. The trenches were occupied by German infantry. Two armoured cars and a mobile gun were in ambush twenty kilometres away.

The divisional commander marked Travkin's information on his map, and there was a general stir. Regimental commanders and staff officers took out their maps, Lieutenant-Colonel Galiev, cold no longer, dropped his cloak to the ground. The head of the political department went to assemble the political officers.

"So you consider it a formidable defence?" the divisional commander asked at last, tracing the last blue pencil lines on his map which he had spread on the bonnet of the jeep.

"Yes, Comrade Commander."

"And you saw the mobile guns yourself?"

"Yes, Comrade Commander."

"And you're not spinning yarns?" the colonel concluded unexpectedly, giving Travkin a shrewd glance from narrowed, grey-green eyes.

"I am not spinning yarns," replied Travkin.

"Don't be offended," said the divisional commander placatingly. "I just asked to be sure, I know that scouts like to lay it on."

"I'm not laying it on," Travkin repeated.

Somewhere the command: "To arms" was given and there was a dull stir and bustle in the forest as the men rose.

Looking at his map, the divisional commander issued his orders.

"The regiments will go in marching formation, as before. The leading regiment will send a strong battalion forward as an advance column. Regimental artillery will accompany the men. Scouts and tommy gunners will cover the flanks. On reaching Height 108.1, the leading regiment will take battle formation. Its headquarters will be on Height 108.1. I shall be in the western thickets of the same forest by the forester's hut. Galiev, prepare battle orders. Report to corps headquarters." And suddenly he added quietly: "Be on the lookout, comrade officers! The artillery regiment is well behind. Shells and cartridges are short. We are in an unfavourable position... We shall all discharge our duty honourably."

The officers swiftly dispersed to attend to their business, leaving only the divisional commander, Galiev and Travkin

by the car. Serbichenko looked at Travkin and his foam-spattered horse.

"You are a grand lad," he said with a smile.

"Anikanov's wounded," said the confused Travkin unexpectedly.

The colonel made no reply, issued final instructions to Galiev and went to the regiments.

Staff officers were continually dashing up to Galiev. He now seemed a different man—noisy, jolly like the mischievous Baku lad he had been thirty years ago. "Galiev has smelled the Germans," the men always said in such moments.

"Go and join your men! Watch the Germans and send messengers!" he called to Travkin.

"Yes, Comrade Lieutenant-Colonel!" Travkin called back and jumped onto his horse again.

In the meantime the other scouts had accompanied Anikanov to the field dressing station, and now rejoined the lieutenant, leading a riderless horse.

Travkin found the agitated Bugorkov where he had left him. He alighted, absently swallowed the vodka the sapper offered and pointed out on the map the location of the next headquarters.

"So the war's starting again," said Bugorkov, looking at Travkin's serious eyes.

The scouts galloped off to meet the unknown.

The sappers, too, set forth, talking quietly about how fighting was beginning again and the end of the fighting was not in sight. No end to this fighting, there wasn't.

"Well, lads," said Bugorkov, "instead of a Hut-Building gang we'll become a Pillbox-Building Inc."

Travkin rejoined his men who were awaiting him on a rise in the forest, not far from the nameless stream beyond which the enemy had dug in.

Marchenko, who had been observing the Germans from a tree top, slithered down it and reported:

"The Germans with the armoured cars and mobile gun were here for about half an hour, and then crossed the stream—to join their forces. I saw that the stream's shallow. The water only came up to the middle of the cars."

The scouts crawled to the stream and disposed themselves in the bushes. Travkin sent the lad home with the horses.

"Follow this road. Don't take all the horses, leave me two of them for one more day. I'll return them tomorrow; otherwise, I'll have nothing to send reports with."

Then Travkin crawled to his men and began examining the German defences. The trenches were recently dug, and not yet completed. They barely reached the shoulders of the Germans passing along them. Two rows of the barbed wire protected them. A narrow, reed-grown stream separated the scouts from the enemy. A man was standing on the breastworks, examining the eastern bank through binoculars.

"I'll send that one to Hitler's mother," whispered Mamochkin.

"Don't be a fool," said Travkin.

He scrutinized the enemy defences. Yes, that barely distinguishable grey strip of earth—that was a second trench. It was not a bad place the Germans had picked to fortify—the western bank was much higher than the eastern and the forest was thick. That height over there near the scattered cottages of the hamlet, was a commanding height, marked "161.3" on the map. The trenches were well manned. The mobile gun stood guard at the eastern edge of the village.

Travkin suddenly thought of Anikanov but it was a vague, fleeting thought. It was like remembering a passenger who has left a train after spending a short time there and then disappeared.

"Look, Comrade Lieutenant," whispered Mamochkin. "Jerry's going for a stroll."

Thirty Germans emerged from the forest and made their way to the stream. Here they spread out and entered the muddy water, looking askance at the opposite bank.

Travkin turned to his best marksman, Marchenko.

"Give 'em a fright."

There was a prolonged burst of tommy-gun fire and bullets raised miniature fountains in the water. The Germans dashed back to their own bank, looking to all sides anxiously, cackling like geese, and then hugged the ground. There was much running about and excitement in the trenches, guttural commands sounded and bullets whistled. The mobile gun on the outskirts of the hamlet shook, roared, and spat out three shells one after the other. A few seconds later German artillery thundered. There were at least ten

guns and for three or four minutes they all combined to plaster the mound. The shells tore up the earth angrily, their screaming passage shattering the forest silence.

The thunder of artillery carried to the advance column—the strengthened battalion. The men halted. Captain Mushtakov, the battalion commander, and Captain Gurevich, battery commander, froze on their horses.

"Forgotten what this is like," said Mushtakov. "Haven't heard that music for more than a month."

The explosions came at regular intervals like the footsteps of approaching fate.

After halting for a moment the battalion moved on. At a turn in the path the soldiers saw a boy in a sheepskin coat, leading some horses. The battalion commander rode up to him.

"What are you doing here?"

"Make haste," said the lad in a frightened whisper. "There's lots and lots of Germans behind the stream, and only fifteen scouts. . . ."

CHAPTER III

What military terminology calls "taking the defensive" begins in this way.

The units deploy and try to break the enemy front from the march. But the men are weary after the uninterrupted advance and artillery and ammunition are short. The attack is beaten off. There is nothing left for the infantry to do but lie down on the wet ground under enemy fire and spring rain and snow. The telephone operators hear the furious orders and curses of the senior officers: "Break through! Get the men up and drive the Germans out!" After the second unsuccessful attack comes the order: "Dig in!"

The war becomes a war of spades. Digging is done at night, in the light of many-coloured German rockets and the flames of neighbouring villages set afire by German artillery. The earth is riddled with a complicated labyrinth of holes and lairs. Soon the whole appearance of the place is changed. It is no longer the wooded bank of a stream grown with rushes and weeds, but a "front line", torn by shells and splinters, divided into zones like Dante's Inferno, bare, seamed with trenches, impersonal, swept by strange winds.

The scouts, listening during the night on what had been a bank of the stream (now it was called no man's land) could hear the blows of German axes and the voices of German sappers also strengthening their advance line.

But there's no cloud without a silver lining. The rear services began to come up, creaking carts brought shells, cartridges, bread, straw and tinned food. And finally the field hospital, the field post, the post exchange and the veterinary point arrived and established themselves somewhere nearby, camouflaged by the woods.

The artillery regiment also came up to the joyful relief of all. The guns were dug in, found the range and delivered a furious barrage on the German trenches and pillboxes to the great satisfaction of the soldiers.

A quieter life began—a wet life, a sticky, muddy, earthy life, but life, nevertheless. And when the field post came up, and fat packets of letters which had collected during a whole month's advance were placed into the eager hands of the soldiers, blue with cold—then it was almost a happy life.

Travkin read his letters—squatting in a slit trench on the very edge of the stream among the rushes and weeds. There was one from his mother, a teacher in a small Volga town, and another from his sister in Moscow. His mother's letter boiled down to one unspoken plea—not to be killed. His sister Lena, studying in the violin class at the Moscow Conservatory, wrote about her successes. She referred to Bach and Chaikovsky with saucy familiarity—"Old Chaikovsky isn't so difficult as I used to think. . . That old Jerry Bach . . ." and so on. Youthful chatter, the even glow of electric lights, the soft gleam of violins—how far away it all was! To tell the truth, Travkin even felt a bit offended at people going to theatres, listening to music, falling in love, studying—while he, Travkin, and others were sitting here in danger of death and—what was still worse—in the pouring rain.

"What do they write, Comrade Lieutenant?" asked Marchenko, sitting alongside with a pair of binoculars.

"Jogging along and looking our way—wondering if we'll soon make an end of it," Travkin replied.

Marchenko nodded smiling, still watching the German positions through his binoculars.

"The Germans seem to be moving," he said.

Travkin took the binoculars. The Germans were rolling a gun out of the forest. He laughed recalling his sister's words about "that old Jerry Bach."

Travkin telephoned Gurevich.

"Look out, Gurevich, they've rolled out a gun for pointblank fire—two fingers to the right of the ruined house. See it?"

"Thanks, Travkin," came the distant voice of the ever alert artilleryman. "We'll send 'em a packet."

Mamochkin appeared thrusting his head through the wet rushes.

"Take a bite, Comrade Lieutenant."

He had brought Travkin half a goose on a plate, the whole wrapped in newspaper.

Sharing the goose with Marchenko Travkin suddenly realized that recently Mamochkin had often been bringing various dainties not included in army rations such as eggs, goose, chicken and sour cream. He was about to inquire where the scout found all these delicacies but at that moment Marchenko drew his attention to the Germans and it slipped his mind.

Mamochkin really had become prosperous. Nobody knew where he procured these quantities of eggs, meat, poultry, pickled cucumber and sour cabbage. To the scouts' questions Mamochkin would reply with a smirk:

"I have a way with me."

Actually, the matter was simple and on the shady side. When Travkin sent Mamochkin back to the village with the last two horses he did not take them to their owners but hired them out "temporarily" to an old widower in a neighbouring hamlet, taking no money but making it a condition that the old man supply him with food. Times were hard, it was necessary to plough and sow and the old man was only too willing.

The young scouts admired Mamochkin, marvelling at his cleverness. The handsome Feoktistov was the most faithful follower, he tried to imitate Mamochkin in everything, even growing a moustache like that of his idol. In the evenings Mamochkin would pass on to the newcomers the oral chronicles of the platoon—laying especial emphasis, of course, on his own exploits. True, he had some condescending words of praise for Anikanov too—the big Siberian who was now history and could no longer dim the fame of Mamochkin.

By bringing Travkin food from his mysterious source of supply, he did not think of currying favour with the commander. Mamochkin was a good judge of men, and he knew well enough that he could never hope to gain any advantage from the lieutenant by such means. Travkin ate goose without even noticing what he was putting into his mouth. Mamochkin extended his "patronage" to his officer because he liked him and admired in him just those qualities which he himself lacked—Travkin's utter devotion to duty, his absolute unselfishness. With surprise Mamochkin observed the accuracy with which the lieutenant measured out the vodka they received, always giving less to himself than to the others. He worked harder than anybody else and rested less. This, Mamochkin could not understand. He felt that the lieutenant acted the right way but he also knew very well that if he were in Travkin's place he would have done differently.

Having brought the lieutenant his regular portion of "horsemeat", as he had dubbed the goose, chickens and other dainties received for the "hire" of the horses, Mamochkin made his way to the barn where the scouts had settled down. Here he almost collided with Colonel Serbichenko, the divisional commander, whom he studiously avoided on account of his green Kuban cap and yellow boots—the colonel gave short shrift to any deviations from the prescribed uniform.

Beside the colonel stood a platinum-blonde girl, her hair cut like a boy's, in an ordinary army uniform with junior sergeant's shoulder straps. Mamochkin had never seen her before, he who could list all the women in the district. Serbichenko was smiling gently as he talked to the girl.

Colonel Serbichenko was protectively tender toward women. In the depths of his heart he felt that the front was no place for them but he did not disdain them as many others did. He regarded them with the compassion of an old soldier who knows the hardships of war.

"Well, how are you? Do you like being here with us?" asked the colonel.

"All right . . . just like anywhere else," the girl replied shyly.

"Like anywhere else, you think? No, my dear, it's not like anywhere else, here with me. My division's a famous one, a Red Banner division!.. Is anyone being rude to you?"

"No, Comrade Colonel."

"Well, if anyone gets fresh, come straight to me. There aren't many girls around and I don't let anybody bother them... And what about you? Do you fall for the boys?"

"What do I want with them?" laughed the girl.

"Don't you try to deceive me... I've seen you several times with Captain Barashkin. Better watch your step."

He said goodbye and went off towards his cottage, leaving the girl under the tree.

The next moment Mamochkin was standing before her.

"My humblest respects, Miss!"

She looked him up and down in surprise.

"Sergeant Mamochkin, scout!" And he clicked his heels dashingly. The girl smiled.

"I haven't seen you before," he said. "Have you come from another unit, or fallen from the skies?"

She laughed and explained that she had been transferred from another division.

"And did you make friends with the scouts there?"

"I was working in rear headquarters."

They walked along side by side, the girl laughing while he cracked jokes in his most brilliant port style, wondering how to lead her away from the crowded path.

"Take my advice, Katyusha,"—he already knew her name—"always make friends with the scouts. Who are the ladies' men? The scouts, of course. Who is it that always have vodka, delicacies, and plenty of watches? The scouts again. Who are the independent daredevils? No doubt about it, the scouts! Understand? And don't you really know any of the scouts?" he continued, smirking teasingly. "What about our famous Captain Barashkin—eh?"

"How do you know?" she said in surprise.

"The scouts know everything!"

She refused to go for a stroll with him in the forest but promised to pay him a visit sometime. At first he was offended by her refusal but soon regained his spirits, and they parted friends.

Returning to the barn Mamochkin found the quiet but tense bustle which always heralded an operation and recalled that today Marchenko was to head a patrol of six men.

Marchenko had only just returned from the forward outposts and was sitting in a corner by an old, rusty thresher writing a letter. The men who were to accompany him were putting on their camouflage capes and fastening on grenades; they were moving about with a peculiar intensity, and kept glancing at Marchenko —wasn't it time to start?

Marchenko was writing to his wife and his old father in Kharkov. He told them that he was alive and well, and that his wife was wrong to think that he had found a girl here, he really wrote often but the post had been held up because of the offensive. The words were commonplace, but this time they seemed to add a special meaning, each line implying another, more significant. He was excited as he signed the letter, gave it to the orderly, and said quietly:

"Well, lads, let's go. Everything ready?"

He fell his men in, inspected them carefully and asked:

"Aren't the sappers here?"

From a heap of straw in a distant corner came a calm, cheerful voice:

"What do you mean not here? The sappers are here all right."

Two sappers rose, with straws hanging to their clothes. They had been sent by Bugorkov to accompany the patrol.

"I'm the senior," resumed the same voice belonging to a short, thick-set soldier of about twenty.

"What's your name?" asked Marchenko, mustering him approvingly.

"Maximenko, I'm from your parts."

"Where from?" asked Marchenko.

"Kremenchug."

"Yes, round about my way... You know your assignment?"

"Yes, I know," replied Maximenko. "Remove the German mines, cut the German wire, let you through the gap and come back in time for the Young Communist meeting tomorrow. I'm youth organizer. That's our assignment."

"Good lad," laughed Marchenko. "Let's go."

And the group advanced in single file along the side of the path to the forward outpost where Travkin awaited them.

CHAPTER IV

On the fifth day after Marchenko's departure, Mamochkin again met Katya and invited her to the scouts' barn where a bottle of home-distilled vodka awaited them.

He spread a white tablecloth in a corner of the barn, laid out attractive dainties and, inviting Feoktistov and several other friends to join them, seated himself on the straw beside Katya.

The feast was at its height when Travkin, whom nobody had expected, suddenly entered the barn.

The appearance of the lieutenant caused a commotion during which Mamochkin succeeded in concealing the bottle and mugs. Truth to tell, Mamochkin did not particularly enjoy having the girl see him blench before his commander, but he would have enjoyed one of Travkin's dressings down still less.

The lieutenant threw a glance at the group in the corner with some girl he had never seen. The men had jumped to attention but he quietly said: "At ease," and lay down on his bed in the far corner. He hadn't slept for three days and nights. Marchenko was to have returned two nights ago, but Travkin had waited in vain in the trench, struggling with drowsiness. The strange and alarming thing was that the two sappers had not come back either, although they should have returned immediately after the patrol had passed the mined area. The whole group had melted in the blind darkness, disappeared, and the rain had washed away their tracks.

Travkin lay down on the flannel quilt and fell into an uneasy sleep.

The subdued scouts drank one more mugful and Katya asked softly:

"Is that your commander? How quiet he is . . . and young."

Travkin tossed in his sleep and suddenly spoke aloud.

"Why did it take you so long to get back, you queer old duck? And the sappers wouldn't come either. But we've been hearing Chaikovsky. And all the time you kept staying away. Queer duck."

He spoke in a quiet, normal voice, not like a man talking in his sleep but as though in full possession of his senses. It was uncanny. The scouts felt uncomfortable and one by one they dispersed about the barn, leaving Mamochkin alone by the white tablecloth.

Katya stole silently up to Travkin and stopped beside him. His eyes were half-open, like those of a sleeping child; the faded tunic was unbuttoned, and an expression of bitter sorrow was printed on his face.

"How handsome he is!" she said softly.

"Don't wake him!" Mamochkin called brusquely but she was not offended, sensing in his words that same tenderness for the sleeping man which she herself felt for him. "Our lieutenant's worried," Mamochkin explained morosely.

Yes, the party was completely spoiled, everybody realized it.

Katya left the barn with a strange, exalted feeling, in a mood of solemn sadness. As she walked through the forest where the spring green was showing, it was with surprise and uneasiness that she became aware of her mood. What could have touched her so, filled her with such a sad, tender joy? Again she saw the almost childlike face of the lieutenant. Perhaps she had seen there something of herself, something akin to the pain that had buried itself deep within her, the unhealed pain of a girl from a small town who at the front had come face to face with the harshness of life at its bitterest.

Katya began to visit the scouts' barn ever more frequently. Mamochkin and the others soon guessed the girl's feeling. Mamochkin was almost pleased. Considering himself the lieutenant's protector in all every-day matters, he decided that a mild flirtation with Katya would distract him from his gloomy thoughts. For the lieutenant had been noticeably dejected since the evident loss of Marchenko and his group.

The scouts kept vieing with each other in inviting Katya to the barn, telling her all the news about the lieutenant, even coming over to the communications company to inform her: "Our lieutenant's come back from the outposts,"—in a word, did everything possible to further the romance. The only person who noticed nothing of all this scheming was Travkin himself.

One day, coming into the barn, he saw that his corner had been curtained off with a waterproof cape, and behind it the blanket spread on straw had been replaced by a real bed with a small table, and on the table—a vase of fresh snowdrops.

"What's all this?" he asked.

"What?" Brazhnikov answered innocently. "That's Katya, the radio operator, looking after you, Comrade Lieutenant."

Travkin flushed crimson.

"Why do you admit strangers to platoon quarters?" he asked.

Brazhnikov looked guilty and said nothing. Mamochkin hearing about this threw up his hands.

"What a man! Can't think of anything but the Germans! All the time drawing plans of their defences, sitting over maps and spending whole days in the forward outposts. . . ."

As for Katya, at first she was discouraged by Travkin's reserve and youthful shyness. She was far from accustomed to such an attitude. She was used to being welcomed everywhere, although she knew that the secret of her easy popularity was not any particular charm of her own but simply the fact that there were plenty of men out here and very few girls.

Then suddenly she felt doubly happy: her beloved was no ordinary man, no, he was proud, stern and pure. And that was how he ought to be. An unaccustomed shyness would overcome her in his presence, a shyness that surprised even herself. Could this be she, who had always considered herself a hardened little sinner? Stolen kisses and embraces in the bustle of campaign life, token of a swiftly-passing emotion or simply out of boredom —and she had called that life!

She thought of it all as of something rather disgraceful but already in the distant past.

Every day she came to the barn with flowers and fluffy branches of willow. But it was not so much the flowers themselves that mattered—she brought that fragrance of sweet womanliness for which the soldiers' lonely hearts were hungering. And they even disapproved of their commander for his indifference to the girl although at the same time they were proud of his aloofness.

One day the head of the army reconnaissance Colonel Semerkin, visiting the division, entered the barn just as Katya was putting fresh flowers into a blue vase. He had come to see how the scouts were getting on, but he found nobody there except the cook, the orderly and the girl.

"Who are you?" asked the colonel.

"Junior Sergeant Simakova of the radio service," she said.

"Oh, I thought you were a flower sellere," the choleric colonel growled, and left the barn.

Then he talked a long time to the divisional commander. They argued politely but did not mince words.

"You don't know a thing about the enemy in this sector," Colonel Semerkin accused the divisional commander. "Have you any clear idea of their groupings and plans?"

Colonel Serbichenko, restraining himself, tried to laugh it off.

"And how should I know? A divisional commander doesn't always know what's going on even among his own men. How can he know what the enemy's doing? I sent scouts out on patrol and they never came back. Nine men mean nothing to you. You're an army. But I'm on a smaller scale and to me nine casualties are a very big loss indeed. I've lost a lot of scouts in the fighting."

"That's true," replied Colonel Semerkin. "But look what's going on among your scouts. I went to their barn—nobody there. Even the orderly didn't know where they were. True, there *was* a girl there—arranging flowers. Perfectly idyllic! But your intelligence officer only just told me that he'd received a serious complaint about your scouts. Yes, Comrade Colonel, you don't know about it, but I do. A complaint from some village or other. There's the reason for the scouts' bad work."

Colonel Serbichenko ordered the intelligence officer to be summoned.

Captain Yoskin soon appeared—inconspicuous, quiet, with a slightly pockmarked face and a big, dome-like bald head. He gave a detailed account of a complaint from a neighbouring village to the effect that the scouts had requisitioned—arbitrarily! —twelve horses, of which they had returned only ten.

"What makes you think that these were our scouts?"

The intelligence officer was not daunted by the divisional commander's menacing expression.

"This is not yet definitely established," he said.

"Then establish it and report back. You may go."

The intelligence officer disappeared and the divisional commander told Colonel Semerkin wearily:

"Well, we'll send a patrol out into the

enemy rear. But you try and give us scout replacements."

When the conference broke up, Colonel Serbichenko left the cottage.

"I shall soon be back," he said to the orderly who had jumped to attention at the door.

He made his way towards a lazily turning windmill, and going up to one of the barns scattered about asked the orderly at the door:

"Scouts?"

"Yes, Comrade Colonel," the man replied and turned to shout into the darkness: "Atten-tion!"

There was a rustling in the barn. The commander peered about him. Eight scouts were standing to attention in the dim light. One corner was curtained off with a waterproof cape. The colonel walked silently to this corner, raised the cape and saw Katya, also standing to attention. On the small table stood a vase of flowers flanked by books and notebooks.

The commander's angry gaze softened a little. He looked at Katya searchingly.

"What are you doing here?" he asked, then turning to the sergeant on duty who had run up to report, he asked: "Where's your commander?"

"The lieutenant is in the forward outpost."

"Send him to me when he comes back."

He went to the door, then looked round.

"Are you stopping here, Katya, or will you come with me?"

"I'll come," said Katya.

They left together.

"What are you so embarrassed about?" asked the colonel. "There's nothing bad in it. Travkin's a good lad and a fine scout."

She made no reply.

"What? Fallen in love? Grand! But how about Captain Barashkin? Dismissed?"

"That was nothing," she said, "—nothing that mattered. Just nonsense. . . ."

The colonel grumbled something, then looking searchingly at the girl's lowered lashes, he asked:

"And what about him, Travkin? Pleased I bet? A pretty girl, and flowers. . . ."

She said nothing, and he understood.

He was touched by the age-old tragedy of unrequited love, embodied in this newly-fledged chick with a junior sergeant's epaulettes. Here, in the very furnace of war, young love was fluttering like a bird about to be swallowed by a crocodile. The colonel smiled.

They met Assistant Army Doctor Ulybysheva and the colonel invited her and Katya for a cup of tea.

In the colonel's cottage the doctor and Katya got busy preparing the tea, assisted by the orderly. The fat samovar began to hiss and bubble, and they all sat down at the table, talking gaily about everything under the sun.

Soon Travkin appeared.

"Sit down," the colonel invited him.

Katya feared the colonel might tease her about Travkin, but he never even mentioned the subject. Conversation turned to some horses while Katya glanced shyly at the lieutenant, at his serious young face, listening to his clear, businesslike replies, although their sense passed her by.

"What use could he have for me?" she thought bitterly. "He's so clever and serious, his sister's a violinist, and he—he'll be a scientist. And I? Just an ordinary girl like thousands of others."

Travkin, for his part, had not the slightest idea of the real nature of Katya's feeling for him. All she did was to annoy and puzzle him. Her unexpected visits to the barn, her unsolicited care for his comforts—all this struck him as stupid, obtrusive, even indecent. He felt awkward before his scouts who would exchange meaning glances whenever she came to the barn and make awkward attempts to leave them alone together.

He was astonished to find her in the divisional commander's room and sitting over the samovar at that. And when the colonel began talking about the horses, Travkin's first thought was that Katya had learned about them from the scouts and was making trouble for him.

He explained briefly how the matter had come about and the colonel suddenly recalled those days of the advance, the endless marches, the short, sharp clashes, and that time in March when he had stood on the shattered road sarcastically reprimanding the scouts. And for an instant Corporal Serbichenko, the old scout of World War I, looked approvingly out of Colonel Serbichenko's narrowed, grey-green eyes.

"Good lad, Travkin."

Then the colonel asked:

"And you actually did return the horses?"

"I certainly did," replied Travkin.

There was a knock at the door and Captain Barashkin appeared on the threshold.

"What do you want?" asked Serbichenko, displeased.

"Didn't you send for me, Comrade Colonel?"

"I sent for you three hours ago. Has Semerkin spoken to you?"

"Yes, Comrade Colonel."

"Well?"

"We'll send out a patrol into the enemy rear."

"Who'll lead it?"

"Travkin, here," Barasbkin replied with concealed malice.

But he had mistaken his man. Travkin never flickered an eyelid. Ulybysheva calmly refilled the glasses, understanding nothing of what it was all about, while Katya had no idea that these words were directly connected with the fate of her love.

The only person present who saw through the captain was the divisional commander but he had no reason for not agreeing with Barashkin. There could be no doubt about it, Travkin was the best person to take charge of this unusually difficult operation.

"Very good," said the commander and dismissed Barashkin.

Travkin did not stay much longer.

"Very well, go along," the colonel said, as he rose. "Make thorough preparations, it's a big job."

"Yes, Comrade Colonel," said Travkin, and left the cottage.

The colonel listened to the scout's retreating footsteps and then said cheerlessly:

"A fine lad."

After Travkin's departure Katya could not sit still. She soon said goodbye and left. It was a warm, moonlit night and the forest was wrapped in a deep silence broken only by a distant explosion or the rumble and rattle of a solitary lorry.

Katya was happy. It seemed to her that Travkin had looked at her more kindly than usual; and she thought wistfully that the all-powerful divisional commander, who was always so kind to her would certainly be able to convince Travkin that she wasn't such a bad girl after all. And she wandered through the moon-drenched night seeking her beloved, whispering old, old words, almost the same as in the Song of Songs although she had never read it.

CHAPTER V

"How do you do, Comrade Lieutenant, this is from Ivan Vassilievich Anikanov, your scout, sergeant and commander of the first group. This is to tell you that I am well, hoping it finds you the same. In the hospital they cut out the bullet which was in the flesh of the leg. From the hospital I was sent to a reserve regiment. At first it was rather bad there because the food was worse than it is at the front, and I like good food, and I am used to the front-line rations. And all day long I had to keep training and study regulations all over again from the beginning, and to run and shout 'Hurrah,' and, of course, there are no Germans and no ammunition for shooting. And another thing. They took away my Walter revolver that I took from the German captain, you remember, with the black bandage over his eye. I went to complain to the battalion commander here but he said that according to regulations a sergeant does not carry a revolver. And when I said that I was not an ordinary sergeant but a scout and that I must have handled two hundred revolvers like that, he would not listen. Then I was transferred to an auxiliary farm and I'm living like a wealthy collective farmer. I have everything —sour cream, butter and all kinds of vegetables. Especially as I'm in charge, something like a collective farm chairman. So we spend all our time ploughing and sowing. And in the evenings I have a good supper and drink milk and then lie down on a featherbed. And where I live the woman's husband was killed in the first year of the war and she's always around. And I'm always thinking of you, Comrade Lieutenant, and the other fellows in my platoon, and remembering all our jobs, and most of all, how you are having it hard and shedding your blood fighting for our land; it makes me feel very bad. And please, Comrade Lieutenant, will you speak to Colonel Serbichenko, perhaps he could send an application and they would let me come back to you. I cannot go on here without you all. I feel ashamed at not finishing the war together with you and living here like a prosperous collective farmer. It's like you are protecting me from the Germans.

With greetings to you and to all the platoon,

Ivan Vassilievich Anikanov."

Travkin smiled, moved by the letter as he read it over and over again. He could see Anikanov as if he stood beside him and thought how good it would have been to have the scout with him now. It was with something like contempt that he looked at the faces of his sleeping men and mentally compared them with the absent Anikanov.

"No," thought Travkin. "No comparison. They haven't got that quiet courage, unhurried thinking and clear brain. He didn't know the meaning of the word—panic. Mamochkin's brave but he hasn't enough common sense and he's selfish. Bykov's got sense but a bit too much of it. There are times when sober sense is no better than cowardice. Brazhnikov can't stand on his own feet solidly enough although he's got his points. Semyonov and the others—they aren't scouts at all yet. Marchenko—he was the right kind but he's evidently been killed and I shan't get him back."

Besieged by these bitter thoughts—which actually did his scouts less than justice, coloured as they were by the mood induced by Anikanov's letter—Travkin left the barn and went out into the cold dawn. He went to the steep bank which was his favourite for tactical exercises with the scouts.

This was a place where he could reproduce the actual conditions of the front line. The bank was crossed by a broad stream overhung by weeping willows already turning green. A shallow trench dug by the scouts especially for training and two lines of barbed wire represented the enemy front line.

Each night Travkin took his scouts to this "theatre of operations." With his characteristic tenacity he drove them through the icy ford, made them clip wire and test for non-existent mines with long sappers' detectors, then jump across the trenches. Yesterday he thought of a new game. Stationing several scouts in the trenches he made the others crawl up to them as quietly as possible to accustom the men to noiseless movement. He too sat in the trench listening to the nocturnal sounds, but his thoughts were not here, they were in the real enemy outposts where the Germans had been able to set up a strong system of engineering defences which he would soon have to get through.

Besides, the platoon had got replacements—ten new scouts, so that in addition to his special practice with the group picked for the coming operation he had to train the newcomers. And then he had to keep a daily watch on the enemy from the outposts, studying his routine and behaviour.

This ceaseless intensive work gradually made him extremely irritable. Previously he had been inclined to close his eyes to the scouts' small misdemeanours but now he crimed them for the slightest fault. The first one to be caught was Mamochkin. Travkin inquired sternly where he was getting all these dainties. Mamochkin mumbled something about gifts from the peasants but Travkin gave him three days' arrest, saying:

"Let the peasants have a rest from you for three days."

As for Katya, he politely but firmly requested her for the present—that was what he said: for the present—to stop visiting the barn. True, he felt rather awkward when he met her frightened eyes and rather wanted to take his words back, but refrained.

But the thing which infuriated him most was the unprecedented case of Feoktistov, the tall handsome fellow from somewhere near Kazan.

It was raining and Travkin had decided to give the scouts a rest. In the morning he left the barn and went towards Barashkin's pillbox where the interpreter Levin was giving him German lessons. In the bushes by the mill he suddenly saw the tall, well-built Feoktistov lying in the grass stripped to the waist under the pouring rain. Travkin asked in surprise what he thought he was doing there, and Feoktistov jumped up and said with some embarrassment:

"I take cold baths, Comrade Lieutenant. I always did it at home."

But that same night when the men were practising how to move noiselessly, Feoktistov coughed loudly. At first Travkin paid no attention, but when he heard the second cough he understood everything. Feoktistov had purposely sought to catch cold. Naturally he knew from the talk of the older scouts that a man who coughed was never taken on patrol since he might betray the whole group.

Never before in his whole short life had Travkin felt such blazing anger. It cost him great effort not to shoot this tall, handsome, cowardly wretch right there where he stood in the moonlight before the amazed eyes of the other scouts.

"So that's why you take cold baths, you dirty coward!"

The next day Feoktistov was discharged from the platoon.

The sun rose, it was time to go to the forward outposts. Taking two scouts with him, Travkin followed his usual path to the end of the world, the river.

As they advanced the very air seemed to change—it became heavy with tension as though this were not the accustomed atmosphere of Earth, but the other of some great unknown planet. Great splashes of machine-gun fire . . . the deafening thud of mortar shells . . . and then a menacing silence pregnant with sudden death. . . Passing shell-shattered trees, passing artillery positions, the scouts in their green capes advanced in single file nearer and nearer to the war.

In the second battalion trenches Travkin met Mamochkin. He had sent him here after his three days in the guardhouse to be in permanent charge of the observation post—"closer to the Germans, farther from the chickens." Clicking his heels dashingly, Mamochkin handed him the observation plan and notes on enemy movements during the previous twenty-four hours.

From a machine-gun post Travkin examined the enemy outposts through his periscope. The battalion commander, Captain Mushtakov, and Captain Gurevich of the artillery usually joined him here. They knew of the approaching patrol and with considerable irritation he saw an expression of something like apology in their eyes, as though saying: you've got to go over *there*, while we'll be sitting in well-protected pillboxes. Their very courtesy, their constant eagerness to be of assistance, got on his nerves. His whole being rose up in protest against their thoughts which seemed to have condemned him to death. He laughed as he squinted through the periscope, thinking to himself: "You wait, my friends, I'll outlive you all!"

Not that he wished them ill. On the contrary, he had a great liking for both of them. Mushtakov was young, handsome, vigorous, and the best battalion commander in the division. And as for the artilleryman, Travkin was particularly attracted by his politeness and orderliness under all conditions, and his unusual mathematical gifts. His battery was noted for always being on the mark and the Germans feared and hated it in equal measure. And Gurevich used to spend days on end in the trench watching the Germans with the persistence of hatred, and he always had invaluable information for Travkin. In Gurevich Travkin saw his own fanatical devotion to duty. Not to think of his own advantage, only of the job on hand—this was how Travkin had been brought up and Gurevich belonged to the same school. They talked of each other as kinsmen, and indeed they were both of the same breed—the breed that believe in a cause and are prepared to give their lives for it.

Travkin gazed intently at the German trenches and the barbed wire entanglements before them, fixing in his mind the slightest inequalities in the ground, the direction of the enemy machine-gun fire, and occasional movements in the communication trenches.

It was with a feeling approaching envy that he looked at the crows flying freely between our outposts and those of the enemy. For them there were no menacing barriers. They were the ones that could have disclosed everything that went on on the German side! He dreamed of a talking crow, of a crow-scout, and could he but have become one himself he would cheerfully have sacrificed his human form.

After watching and making notes till his head span, Travkin left the scouts to continue observation and went to Mushtakov's pillbox.

The young platoon commanders had all gathered here, men who had only just arrived from training school, in new uniforms with broad canvas top-boots. They greeted him in respectful silence, breaking off their noisy chatter. Sitting at the table Travkin felt their curious gaze and his thoughts turned to them, to their fate.

Their life span was frequently so very short. They would grow up, go to school; have their hopes, joys and troubles —and then one foggy morning they

would get their men up for an attack and would sink onto the wet ground to rise no more. Sometimes the men could not even remember them with kindly words—they had known them too short a time, they had remained strangers. What kind of heart beat beneath this tunic? What thoughts were behind that smooth young brow?

Travkin who was about their age felt infinitely older. It was pleasant to know that he had already done something. If he fell his men would be sorry. Even the divisional commander would have a thought for him. "And that girl," he suddenly thought, "that Katya."

And on the eve of what might be his own death he looked at the young officers with condescension and a kind of pity.

There was one, a lad with big blue eyes constantly fixed on Travkin, who attracted him at sight. Meeting the scout's eye, the boy said shyly:

"Take me with you. I'd join the patrol with pleasure." That was the phrase he used—"with pleasure." Travkin smiled.

"Very well. I'll ask divisional HQ to let you come. I haven't any too many men."

On arriving at HQ he actually did make this request to Galiev, who agreed and gave orders for the necessary instructions to be telephoned to the regiment.

So now the barn received Lieutenant Meshchersky—a slender, blue-eyed lad of twenty in broad canvas top-boots. He had several books in his small suitcase and in his free time he would read poems to the scouts who sat listening in the dim light of the barn to the melodious rhythm of words, marvelling at the art of the poet and at Meshchersky's flush of excitement.

In Travkin's absence, Katya visited the barn. Meshchersky greeted her politely, shook hands and invited her to sit down. The scouts liked this although it amused them, unaccustomed as they had become to the common forms of politeness.

Once Meshchersky happened to mention Katya to Travkin.

"That's a fine girl, that radio operator."

"Who do you mean?"

"Katya Simakova. She often comes here."

Travkin was silent.

"Why, don't you know her?" asked Meshchersky.

"I know her. But what do you find so fine about her?"

"She's kind. She does the laundry for the scouts, and they read her their letters from home, tell her all their news. Everybody's glad when she comes. And she sings beautifully."

Another time Meshchersky suddenly exclaimed with his characteristic enthusiasm:

"But she loves you! Honest, she does! Do you mean to say you haven't noticed? It's quite plain... I'm awfully glad for you."

Travkin's smile was strained.

"How do you know? Has she told you, or what?"

"No, why should she?.. I can see it myself. She's a wonderful girl, I tell you."

"Oh, she'd love anybody," said Travkin unkindly.

Meshchersky looked distressed and cried out:

"How can you say that... How can you even think that? It's not true."

"Time for night training," Travkin cut the subject short.

Meshchersky took his training very seriously, finding an almost childlike pleasure in it. He crawled till he was exhausted, entered the icy water boldly, and was ready to spend the night listening to the endless tales of the platoon's exploits.

Travkin liked Meshchersky more and more; he would look approvingly at the blue-eyed lad, thinking: "He's the stuff scouts are made of...."

CHAPTER VI

"So tomorrow night we're off. Hope it's a dark night—that's the main thing for reconnaissance," Mamochkin held forth, showing off before the young scouts.

He was in his cups. In view of the approaching patrol Travkin had released him from outpost duty to rest and Mamochkin immediately made his way to "his" old widower. When he returned to the barn he brought a jug of honey, a bottle of homemade vodka, a tin of butter, eggs, and three kilograms of sausage. The old man's timid protests at the size of the tribute demanded he waved aside contemptuously:

"Never mind, old man. It's quite possible that you won't be seeing me again. I'll go straight to heaven, of course. When I meet your old woman there I'll tell her what a good man you are. Now don't argue, this is maybe the last time you'll be giving me anything. . . ."

Considering the unusual circumstances, Mamochkin even decided to disclose the secret of his "supply base." He took Bykov and Semyonov with him, and loaded them with provisions, smiling with self-satisfaction and asking continually:

"Well, how do you like it?"

Semyonov was filled with admiration for Mamochkin's incomprehensible, almost magical good fortune.

"That's grand! How've you managed it?"

But Bykov, suspecting that there was something here not quite as it should be, said dubiously:

"Look out, Mamochkin, the lieutenant'll find out."

As they passed the old man's field Mamochkin squinted at "his" horses harnessed to plough and harrow. They were being driven by the old man's son, a silent, stooping idiot, and his daughter-in-law, a tall, handsome woman.

Mamochkin looked at the big sorrel with the white star and remembered that it belonged to the queer old woman where the platoon had stopped to rest.

"She is calling down curses on our head, that sweet old girl," flashed through his head and for a brief instant he felt something almost like a prick of conscience. But now all this was unimportant. Ahead was the patrol and who could tell how it would end?

Entering the barn Mamochkin saw Travkin sitting by the old thresher, pencil in hand, starting a letter to his mother and sister. Mamochkin suddenly paled and went quietly up to the lieutenant. A rare timidity flickered in his eyes. Travkin looked at him in surprise.

"Comrade Lieutenant," said Mamochkin, "how about a transmitter? Shall we be taking one?"

"Yes, Brazhnikov's picking one up right now."

"And an operator?"

"I'll send the messages myself. Not worth while taking an operator. We might get a coward or a fool. No, we'll manage ourselves, I understand radio a bit."

"Aha. . . ."

There was obviously nothing more for Mamochkin to say but he hung about.

"Comrade Lieutenant," he said, "Would you like some pork sausage?"

He expected the lieutenant to make short work of him—"plundering the peasants again. . ." But Travkin refused with curt thanks and turned back to his letter. Then Mamochkin made up his mind. His voice suddenly trembling he implored:

"Comrade Lieutenant, don't write that letter."

"What's biting you?" Travkin asked in surprise.

"It was the same way, here, at the thresher that Marchenko wrote a letter before he left. It's a bad omen. Our fishermen at home believe in omens . . . and honest, they're right."

"Cut that stuff, Mamochkin, that's just old wives' tales," said Travkin mockingly yet softly.

Mamochkin turned away and Travkin picked up his pencil again but at that moment his eye fell upon a dark heap of straw near the entry. At one end lay a small knapsack darkened with age, sweat and rain . . . Marchenko's bed.

Travkin did not finish his letter after all. Brazhnikov arrived carrying a small transmitter, followed by Major Likhachev, head of divisional liaison, Katya and two other operators. Likhachev once more explained the use of the coded map and table.

"Look, Travkin. Enemy tanks are 49, and the map's divided into squares. Suppose you want to report tanks in this district. You say: forty-nine square Bull four. If it's infantry, then twenty-one Bull four, and so on."

They practised for the last time. The groups' call signal was to be *Star*, the division's was *Earth*.

Strange words filled with secret meaning sounded in the silent barn. The scouts listened, shuddering involuntarily, as they stood silently around Likhachev and Travkin.

"Earth, Earth. Star calling. Star calling. Twenty-one Buffalo three. Twenty-one Buffalo three. Over to you."

Likhachev, also agitated, replied in a funereal voice:

"Earth calling Star, Earth calling Star. Have I understood: I repeat: Twenty-one Buffalo three. Over to you."

"Star calling Earth. Correct. Continuing. Forty-nine Tiger two."

The mysterious inter-planetary conversation continued in the gloom of the barn, and the listening men felt as though they really were lost in space.

Taking leave Likhachev shook hands with Travkin and said:

"But maybe you'd like an operator, all the same? I've got good lads and they've been asking to go. Today I even had an application—" he smiled in some confusion—"from Junior Sergeant Simakova—she wants to go with you."

Travkin frowned.

"Oh, no, Comrade Major; I don't need any operator. We're not going for a stroll in the park."

Hearing this ungracious rebuff, Katya ran out of the barn. She bitterly resented Travkin's contemptuous words. "What a horrible, rude man," she thought "Only a fool can love a man like that. . . ."

As she passed Captain Barashkin's pillbox she slackened her pace. "I'll go in, just for spite." With a sudden appreciation she recalled how the captain had followed her about, his honeyed words, his courtesy, his vibrating tenor, his words of love—hackneyed enough but always welcome to a lonely heart. Even his thick notebook filled with poems and songs she recalled with warmth. Everything about this man was ordinary, simple and understandable, and in this moment it seemed to her that it was just this that made for happiness.

She entered the pillbox. Barashkin met her with a smile somewhat surprised but pleased. The thought flashed through his mind that now Travkin was going and the pretty wench had made up her mind not to let him, at least, slip through her fingers. The well-used notebook appeared with its songs from the films and sentimental romances. But Katya was not in the mood for singing today.

Barashkin tried in every way possible to get rid of the interpreter Levin. But when the man finally left and Barashkin embraced Katya with trembling hands, she was suddenly overcome by such a repulsion that she pushed him away and ran out into the murmuring forest. Never, never again. All this, the "usual" stuff, was alien to her now and disgusting. Tears filled her eyes.

Meanwhile Travkin was having a most unpleasant conversation.

The quiet, insignificant, slightly pock-marked intelligence officer, Captain Yoskin, entered the barn. There was nothing inter-planetary in this conversation. The captain seated himself beside Travkin behind the curtain of waterproof capes and began enquiring in detail how and when the horses had been taken, on what grounds, when and under what circumstances they had been sent back, and why the receipt had not been returned. . . .

Travkin related, morosely but in detail, exactly how everything had happened. When asked about the receipt he paused for a moment trying to recollect. Ah, yes, he had kept two of the horses for another day and Mamochkin had returned them. He called Mamochkin but the scout was not in the barn. Captain Yoskin said that he would return later. Before leaving the barn he turned around as if by chance, saw the white tablecloth on Mamochkin's bed while the others were covered with mackintosh capes, but said nothing and left.

When Mamochkin returned Travkin called him over, but on second thought asked nothing about the horses. After all, Mamochkin was to accompany him on the patrol. He contented himself with asking where the scout had been for the past two hours. Mamochkin said he had been with the sappers and that ended the conversation.

Travkin and Meshchersky set off to visit Bugorkov. On the way, Meshchersky who seemed worried about something suddenly burst out:

"Travkin, say what you like, I'm going to call Katya over. You didn't notice anything but I did. I can't help being sorry for her. She was terribly upset when she ran out. You shouldn't have hurt her like that."

He came to Bugorkov's pillbox leading a very shy Katya. Yet she did not fail to notice Travkin's guilty look.

It was a lively evening filled with glowing hopes for Katya. And for Travkin it ended with a most pleasant surprise.

The gay chatter was suddenly interrupted by a panting Brazhnikov bursting into the pillbox. His eyes were sparkling, he had forgotten his cap and strands

to run up the creaking staircase, he found himself in a passage in front of a window. What he saw through the window surpassed all his expectations. Arseni Romanych had not lied when he told Alyosha, as they walked from the station, of all the marvels he would find in his new apartment; but he could not give the boy even a faint idea of the extraordinary world that was now spread out before him.

A big garden sloped down away from the house. Some of the trees were already burgeoning, others had opened fat buds to allow long, velvety, beet-coloured catkins to hang down. There were spots of light that seemed like little yellow chicks feeding on the footpaths. There were different kinds of grass—very short grass that looked as if it had been clipped with shears and tall tangled grass. An old wheelbarrow with the wheel missing was lying on its side. "We'll fix that wheel," thought Alyosha and looked up beyond the garden.

The first things he distinguished clearly were a white church and a tall, slender steeple behind it. There, just beyond the church and the steeple he saw something that he did not recognize—flashing vividly, tremendous in size, like many, many fields on end, it stretched in all directions and met the sky. Then he realized that there were no fields there but water, and then with still greater suddenness it dawned on him that the water must be the Volga.

"The Volga! Mummie! The Volga!"

Nobody answered him, they were all too busy carrying the luggage in, and for a moment he was swept with doubt—perhaps he had been mistaken? The Volga should have been something like the Neva, but much bigger of course. Alyosha, however, was looking at something that did not remind him of the Neva at all. There was no real end to it, and the place where the land most likely began was just as flat and endless as the water. The colour was different there, a sort of lilac-grey, but the colour was alive and mobile, like the water. Over there he could also see separate trees and perhaps little houses, but even they seemed to be growing out of the water. Alyosha had so often heard that there are big steamers on the Volga. But no matter how much he searched with his eyes he could see nothing but water and more water and not a single steamer. Quite nearby, over the roofs of the houses, Alyosha certainly did see two little dark boats moving towards each other. Boats, however, could be anywhere, not necessarily on the Volga.

Alyosha decided to find out for certain whether it was the Volga or not, and he was even glad that nobody had heard him shout "Volga!" And then there, from behind the church, there appeared on the water a little triangle which began to grow in size as though it were coming out of the church like the lid slides out of a pencil box. The triangle grew into a square, a second square appeared on top of the first, and they both continued emerging from the church; the bottom square carrying the top one along with it; suddenly a third appeared just like the second and the first and they all began to stretch out into long strips: then the sunlight caught them and Alyosha could see the little windows on each of the strips and when more and more of the windows came out of the church Alyosha realized that it was a steamer. Yes, it was a steamer moving along not far from the bank. More and more visible signs of the fact that it was a ship came into view—a boat on the upper deck, the pilot house, a black funnel, another boat, and down below, under the paddlewheel, froth like the beaten white of an egg and a wave that spread out fanwise from the vessel; on the deck there was another boat after which the upper strip with the windows broke off suddenly, a little further and the middle strip broke off and at last came the stern of the steamer and a sloping flagstaff with an up-ended boat hanging from it above which a pennant was flying; and the whole of this huge three-decker, from stem to stern, was as clear to him as if it lay on his hand, and there it was floating along in front of Alyosha, who stood on tiptoe holding tight to the window frame; and as though it wished to leave no doubt in the boy's mind, the steamer angrily belched forth a cloudy puff of milk-white steam and a second later the screech of a siren that sounded like an irritated, elderly person came dully in at the window.

"A steamer on the Volga!" shouted Alyosha beside himself with excitement.

"Hurrah!" shouted Arseni Romanych in response, dropping a suitcase on the

danger unnecessarily. Be careful, the war'll soon be over."

But he himself had once been a scout and he well knew that parting words like these could lead to no good—they would chill even a man with the strongest sense of duty. A man may forget a lot on the job but such words as: "Take care of yourself," coming from a senior officer would never be forgotten—and that would mean almost certain failure.. So the colonel shook hands with Travkin and said only:

"Watch out. . . ."

CHAPTER VII

Donning his camouflage cape and tightly fastening all the tapes—at the ankle, the waist, beneath the chin and at the back of the neck—the scout takes leave of all every-day matters, large and small. He no longer belongs to himself, to his command, or to his memories. He fastens grenades and a dagger to his belt and thrusts a revolver inside his coat against his chest, and doing so he renounces all human habits, outlaws himself, from now on relying on himself alone. He hands over all his documents, letters, photographs, Orders and medals to the corporal, and his Communist Party or Komsomol card to the Party organizer. He cuts himself off from his entire past and his future, preserving it in his own heart only.

He is nameless as a bird in the forest. He may even forsake human speech, limiting himself to chirping and whistling to signal his comrades. He melts into the fields, the forests, the gullies, he becomes the spirit of these places—a dangerous spirit, a spirit in ambush, his thoughts on one thing only—his job.

Thus begins that ancient game with two players only—man and death.

Sending his men on ahead Travkin made his way to the forward outposts accompanied by Meshchersky and Bugorkov. Meshchersky was thoroughly miserable. Lieutenant-Colonel Galiev, learning of Anikanov's return, had decided after some deliberation to leave the lieutenant behind, to take Travkin's place.

"You never know what may happen and the scouts are left without an officer," he said to the divisional commander, and the latter agreed.

The three officers walked along forest paths talking quietly. Actually all the talking was done by Bugorkov while the saddened Meshchersky listened and Travkin stared absently in front of him.

"If only the war'd end soon," Bugorkov concluded irrelevently with a sidelong glance at Travkin's serious face.

Travkin made no reply. He was always particularly silent just before a job. This assumed, almost sleepy calm cost him no small effort of will. It was as though he were saying: everything's done that can be, and from now on let things take their course.

One of the artillery regiment's batteries had taken up position on a wide ridge overgrown with spruce saplings. The artillerymen were busy about the dug-in guns. Seeing Travkin they waved to him and called:

"Off on a job again?"

"Yes," Travkin answered curtly.

He was expected in the trench. Captain Mushtakov was there with Captain Gurevich and the commanders of two mortar companies. Anikanov and the other scouts were squatting on their heels in the trench talking quietly.

Captain Gurevich detailed their coordinated actions.

"So I'll lay a barrage on target six to distract the Germans' attention. Make sure not to get too far to the left, Travkin, or you'll come under my fire. After that the mortars and my guns will go for target four. If I see a red rocket from you I'll transfer to targets two, three, four, five and seven to cover your retreat."

"Mortars got the range?" asked Travkin.

"Yes, everything's ready," the mortar commanders answered.

"And my machine guns are ready too, just in case," said Mushtakov.

It was easy to see they were all excited.

Travkin climbed onto the breastwork and listened intently to the sounds coming from the German outposts. Somewhere in the distance a gramophone was playing a foxtrot. Off to the left white Verey lights soared up every now and then.

He jumped back into the trench, turned to his scouts and sappers, and said:

"Here are the instructions."

The men slowly rose.

"The enemy is holding this sector with his hundred and thirty-first infantry division. According to information in our possession he is regrouping his forces behind his rear defense lines. Orders are to reconnoitre the enemy rear, discover the character of the regrouping, the enemy reserves and tanks, and report to headquarters by radio."

Having told the scouts in what order they would advance and informed them that Anikanov was second in command, Travkin nodded silently to the officers in the trench, climbed over the breastworks and moved noiselessly down to the bank of the stream. He was followed by Brazhnikov, Mamochkin, Golub, Semyonov, Bykov and the three sappers who were to accompany the group. Anikanov was the last to disappear from sight.

The men in the trench remained standing motionless for several minutes. Then Gurevich suddenly started swearing in most elaborate fashion, asked Mushtakov for vodka and actually drank a whole glass wrinkling his face in disgust. Gurevich was known never to swear or drink. Mushtakov was surprised but made no remark.

Meanwhile Travkin had stopped in the low bushes on the bank of the stream. The scouts waited but for some reason Travkin made no move. For about three minutes they stood in silence. Suddenly a German Verey light seared the darkness, broke hissing into blinding fragments, shedding a milky light over the stream, and disappeared just as suddenly. This was evidently what Travkin had been awaiting. He entered the dark, cold water, followed by the other men. Swiftly crossing the stream they halted again in the shadow of the western bank waiting for the next rocket. Then Travkin sent the sappers ahead and followed them, his scouts coming on behind.

Avoiding a hollow which turned out to be much larger than Travkin had imagined when he observed it from the other bank, the sappers stopped. Here the mined area began.

Testing the ground with their long detectors and listening to the sound-box hanging on the chest of one of them, the sappers moved slowly forward.

Another light soared up. Instinctive fear pressed the scouts to the earth. They were lying on even, high ground and it seemed to them this terrible, dead light made them visible to the whole world. But the rocket died out and silence reigned.

The sappers, their hands moving cautiously in the darkness, had taken the sting out of several mines. A heavy burst of machine-gun tracer bullets soared over their heads and rushed into the distance. The scouts froze. Another similar burst crackled drily to the left. From our positions, too, a lonely Maxim rattled, its bullets, a last greeting, flying away somewhere to the right.

Through the dense blackness the leading sapper discerned German wire and crawled back to Travkin. The latter nodded. The sappers began cutting it with big clippers. Another rocket blazed, another burst of tracer bullets flickered by to be extinguished in the thick darkness.

In the light of the rockets Travkin examined the German breastworks, some beams lying near, by the edge of the forest beyond the second line of trenches, and three trees mutilated by shells—his usual point of orientation when observing the German lines. He wheeled slightly to the left. In the darkness the compass azimuth showed a green, phosphorescent glow.

Nocturnal silence reigned about him. But Travkin knew that this silence was deceptive, that many eyes might be watching him in the darkness. He even started slightly at the touch of a sapper's hand on his shoulder. That meant a passage had been cut through the wire. The sappers would remain here to guard the opening in case the scouts had to retreat. If everything remained quiet they were to go "home" in half an hour.

One of the sappers gave Travkin's hand a hard parting grip. Peering at him with eyes now accustomed to the darkness, he saw a big moustache and dark, deep-set, kindly eyes. "Mejidov," Travkin recognized him, "the finest sapper in the division. Bugorkov's done his best."

The patrol crawled through the passage cut in the wire, and froze almost on the German breastworks; an explosion came from the left. The earth shook. A second later another shell burst to the right. "That's Gurevich," thought Travkin.

On his left he heard voices talking in

German. Anikanov and Brazhnikov were already in the trench. The voices were coming closer. Travkin held his breath. Two Germans were approaching along the communication trench quite near by. One of them was eating something. Travkin could even hear him chewing loudly. Then they turned off in another direction. Anikanov appeared over the breastwork and helped Travkin to jump down.

The next moment all seven were standing in the German trench.

Travkin listened intently, then proceeded along the communication trench from which the two Germans had just emerged. It followed a winding course. At a turn Travkin suddenly felt a warning touch from Anikanov who was leading. A German was walking along the breastwork. The patrol hugged the wall of the trench. The German disappeared in the darkness. So far, good. Now all they needed was to get into the forest.

Travkin climbed out of the communication trench and looked about him. He recognized the dark outline of the forester's house which he had seen so often through the periscope. Beside that house was a German machine gun emplacement. He could hear the voices of two Germans there, engaged in some argument. The path into the forest should lie straight ahead. To the left of the road was the rise with two pines, and left of the rise—a stretch of swamp. This was the swamp that they were to cross.

An hour later the patrol disappeared in the forest.

Meshchersky and Bugorkov were standing in the trench staring intently into the night. Every now and then Mushtakov or Gurevich would come up and ask softly:

"Any news?"

No, there had been no red rocket—the signal that the patrol had been discovered and was returning. There had been three bursts of enemy machine-gun fire, but that was evidently just ordinary firing to show that the Germans were awake. Meshchersky, Bugorkov, the two captains and the silent soldiers manning the trench stared intently at the river, at its high western bank, at the bushes, the German wire and the German breastworks. But there was nothing unusual to be seen, absolute nothing.

"The devils!" said Mushtakov admiration. "Disappeared like goblins in the forest."

"Looks as though they've got through." Meshchersky sighed in relief and suddenly realized that he was bathed in perspiration.

Captain Mushtakov rang up regimental HQ. With some excitement the operator said:

"Six hundred on the wire."

From the nocturnal distance came the deep voice of Colonel Serbichenko familiar to the whole division:

"Well, how's things with Travkin?"

"Looks as if everything's all right, Comrade Six Hundred."

"Everything quiet?"

"Quiet, Comrade Six Hundred."

"Bugorkov's men not back yet?"

"Not yet, Comrade Six Hundred."

After a moment's pause the colonel concluded:

"Well, that's fine. Go and get some sleep, Mushtakov."

"Yes, Comrade Six Hundred."

Then again after a short silence.

"The Germans are quiet?"

"Everything's quiet."

"Rockets?"

"Yes, but not very often."

"Firing?"

"Every now and then."

"But not as if. . . ."

"No, no, Comrade Six Hundred. Ordinary firing as they always do."

As he laid the receiver down Mushtakov remarked:

"The old man's worried."

CHAPTER VIII

It was a cold, misty dawn, vibrant with the chilled twittering of birds.

Contrary to the information which had reached HQ the forest was alive with Germans. Wherever one looked there were enormous lorries, even more enormous buses, heavy high-sided carts for a yoke of two horses. And Germans asleep everywhere. Sentries walked in pairs through the forest glades talking gutturally. The scouts' only cover was the darkness but even that was very uncertain. Every now and then it would be stabbed by a match or a flashlight and Travkin and his men would hug the

ground. For an hour and a half they had to make their way through piles of fallen trees, through prickly pine needles.

A German shuffling along barefoot, lighting his way with a pocket-torch, passed close by Travkin. The beam was shining almost on his face, but the sleepy German noticed nothing. He squatted, gasping and groaning.

Mamochkin pulled out his dagger. Travkin did not see it but he felt the swift movement and seized Mamochkin's arm. The German was squatting right beside Travkin's hand.

The man rose and left. As he disappeared his torch lighted a small patch of forest and Travkin, rising, was able to select a path among the trees where the Germans appeared to be fewer in number.

They had to get out of that forest and the quicker, the better.

For a kilometre and a half they crawled almost over the sleeping Germans. On their way, they worked out their tactics. As soon as a German patrol would appear, or some soldier taking care of his needs, the scouts would lie down. Torches were even flashed right onto them twice, but, as Travkin had expected, the Germans thought they were part of their forces. And so they went on—crawling, pretending to be sleeping Germans, crawling again. Finally they made their way through the forest and at dawn were on its fringes.

And here something terrible happened. They literally stumbled onto three Germans, three Germans who were not asleep. They were half-sitting, half-lying on a lorry, wrapped in their blankets, talking. One of them happened to glance at the nearest thicket and gasped thunderstruck. Silently, looking neither to the right nor left, one following the other in an uncanny procession, seven strangely clad men moved along the forest path—no, not men, seven spectres in loose green garments with faces deathly grave, of a terrible, greenish, almost earthy pallor.

The weird appearance of these green shadows, or was it the vague outlines of their forms in the morning mist, gave the impression of something spectral, unearthy. It never even entered the man's mind to think of Russians, of the enemy.

"Grüne Gespenster," he gasped in fright. "Green ghosts!"

If Travkin or one of his men had made the smallest movement of surprise or alarm, the slightest attempt at attack or defence, the Germans would probably have raised the alarm and that misty forest outskirt would have become the arena of a short and bloody clash with the advantage all on the side of the numerous enemy. Travkin was saved by his presence of mind. He instantly figured out that while so far only three Germans had seen him, there was no sense in being the first to provoke a clash, and when he got to the nearest grove where there might be no Germans, he would have a chance to escape, even if these three raised the alarm. He also decided not to run. Instinct rather than reason told him that—the way one must not run from a dog. It senses your fear at once and begins to bark furiously.

With even, unhurried steps the patrol passed the petrified Germans. Plunging into the thicket Travkin looked about feverishly and took to his heels. They swiftly crossed the grove, came out onto a meadow and dashed into the next thicket startling the swamp birds. Here they caught their breath. Anikanov peered round about and ascertained that there were no Germans in sight. Exhausted, the men sank down on the grass and lighted cigarettes. Travkin spoke for the first time since the previous evening:

"Nearly got caught."

He smiled. Speech was difficult, his tongue felt heavy and awkward after a long night of silence.

They had the pleasure of watching about ten Germans in extended order combing through the grove which they had left. Coming out on its western edge the Germans stared hard at the swampy meadow which the scouts had crossed. Then they closed up in a group, talked, laughed—evidently at the three who thought they had seen green ghosts, had a smoke, and left.

The new men—Semyonov and Golub—looked at the Germans with contemptuous surprise. This was the first time they had seen the enemy so close. Travkin, for his part, was closely watching the new scouts. They were behaving well, doing the same as the others. Semyonov, although young as a scout, had seen

plenty of active service, had been wounded twice, and had the cool head of an old soldier. Brisk little Golub, a seventeen-year-old lad from Kursk, whose father, a worker, had been hanged by the Germans, was always in the clouds. His youthful heart held a strange mingling of very real hatred for the murderers of his father and the romanticism of the tales of pathfinders, Indians and bold explorers. The strangeness of the scouts' life filled him with exaltation.

Mamochkin could not but admire Travkin's iron self-control and suddenly, for the first time in the past days, he felt confidence in the success of their dangerous venture. He recalled how he had said goodbye to Katya the previous evening. She had begged him to take care of the lieutenant, and he had patted her shoulder with a complacent smile.

"Don't worry, Katyusha," he said. "With Mamochkin at his side, your lieutenant's as safe as if he were in the bank."

"Looks as if it's the other way round—with this lieutenant it's Mamochkin who is safe," he now admitted to himself and looked at Travkin with gay, once more impudent eyes. He gave each of the men a piece of sausage, reserving the largest for the lieutenant, and poured a whole mug of vodka for him out of his flask.

After making certain that there were no Germans in the grove, and setting a guard to be doubly sure, Travkin took the transmitter from Brazhnikov's back and sent his first radiogram.

It was a long time before he got an answer; the ether was filled with cracklings and faint howls, fragments of talk and music, and on a wavelength very close to his own he caught firm, authoritative German speech. He started involuntarily—a wavelength so near, he feared, might betray the secret of the Star.

Finally he heard a faint reply, a voice repeating the same word over and over:

"Star. Star. Star. Star."

Travkin and the distant operator from Earth exclaimed simultaneously in joy.

"Transmitting to you," said Travkin. "Twenty-one Owl two. Twenty-one Owl two."

Distant Earth, after a moment's silence, reported that it had understood. Understood very well.

"A great many twenty-one, a very great many," Travkin insisted. "Twenty-one only just arrived."

Earth understood that too and repeated like an echo: "A very great many twenty-one."

Spirits rose. To pass such a front line, and then a forest thick with Germans, and after that get radio connections and report the whereabouts of these Germans—that was life!

Again and again Travkin examined the faces of his comrades. They were no longer subordinates, but real comrades, on each one of whom depended the lives of all, and he, the commander, felt them no longer as other men, apart and separate from himself, but like limbs of his own body. If on Earth he could allow them the right to live their own separate lives, have their own weaknesses—here, on this lonely Star, he and they comprised one organic whole.

Travkin was pleased with himself—himself, multiplied seven times over.

After talking it over with Anikanov the lieutenant decided to start at once for the village noted in the plan, where a road crossed the railway line. True, travelling by daylight was dangerous but they could keep to the forests and swamps, skirting villages and much-travelled paths. The Germans usually avoided such parts.

Emerging on the western edge of the grove, however, the scouts immediately spotted a German column moving over the swampy ground. The uniforms were black instead of the usual dark-green and the pince-nez of the officer heading them sparkled menacingly.

"SS men," Anikanov whispered.

The SS detachment was followed by a supply column of twenty huge carts loaded to capacity.

Diving into the neighbouring forest the scouts found fresh crawler tracks, and following them cautiously came out on a glade where they saw twelve armoured transporters standing camouflaged by the bordering trees. The fresh dust on the crawler treads showed that they had arrived quite recently, which could also be gathered from the behaviour of the Germans who were running noisily about the forest, cutting down trees, chopping branches for firewood, and putting up tents—in a word, busy with

everything that men do on arriving at a new place.

The scouts crawled away from this dangerous glade and circled it far to the right, but here they found another German camp full of lorries loaded with ammunition.

The young grass in the forest was littered with empty cigarette packets, tins, dirty fragments of newspaper printed in Gothic, and empty bottles—the traces of a hateful and alien life. Everywhere signboards were nailed to trees, most frequently bearing the figure "5" and the letter "W". The place reeked of Germans, Jerries, fascists—a repellent, hateful stench. The place was packed with Germans—talking gutturally, sleeping, walking and riding—packed with a concentration of German troops.

Travkin and the other men too, understood perfectly well that the Germans were preparing something, concealing fresh forces in the dimness of these great forests. They realized, perhaps for the first time, the full importance of their assignment, the full measure of their responsibility. After dozing for the rest of the day on a small bank the scouts advanced further as night fell.

Soon they came to a lovely place of lakes, large and small, cool, fringed with birches and vibrant with the croaking of frogs.

Travkin halted in a cleft thickly grown with hazel bushes, not far from a lake. A large, two-story stone house stood on the opposite shore. From here came sounds of German speech. A narrow country track ran to the right of the house and on the horizon, between telegraph posts, lay the main road.

Travkin posted a man not far from the road. Lorries and cars were passing in an almost uninterrupted stream. These were worth watching. Sometimes there would be no traffic for an hour and then it would continue as heavy as ever. The lorries were packed with Germans and with mysterious tarpaulin-covered loads. Twice guns passed, drawn by powerful tractors—twenty-four in all.

Travkin observed this stream of traffic continually, some of the others would take turns sleeping while the rest kept count with Travkin of the passing German forces.

"Comrade Lieutenant!" This was Mamochkin appearing from the darkness. "On that track there's a cart with only two Germans. And there's food in the cart. Permit us to finish them off without firing."

Travkin cautiously accompanied him and sure enough a cart was moving slowly along the track. Two Germans were smoking, talking idly. A pig was grunting in the cart. Yes, it was quite a temptation to do away with these Jerries. They were simply asking for it. But Travkin shook his head not without regret.

"Let them go."

Mamochkin was somewhat hurt. With everything going so well, he was in fighting mood, anxious to display his initiative to the other men—and especially Anikanov. "What's the need for all this walking about and prying when there's 'tongues' to be had all round."

Dawn came and with the slow advance of light, movement along the main road stopped.

"They're moving only at night," Anikanov noted. "Hiding from our aircraft. Cooking something up, the swine."

Travkin took his men back to the thick nut grove and the scouts dozed, shivering in the morning chill. Suddenly something like a cry or groan came from the house by the lake.

Somehow the thought of Marchenko flashed through Travkin's mind. There was another cry, then silence.

"I'll go and see what's going on there," Brazhnikov suggested.

"Better not," Travkin replied. "It's getting light."

Dawn had actually broken and glimmers of red were reflected in the lake. After eating some rusks and sausage that Mamochkin had produced out of his bottomless pockets the scouts dozed off again.

But Travkin could not sleep. He crawled nearer to the lake and lay motionless in the bushes, almost on its very brink. The house on the other side was waking up. Men moved around in the yard.

Soon three of them emerged from the gate. The tallest man saluted and began walking slowly away from the house. On a slight rise he turned and waved to the other two standing by the gate, then proceeded quickly along the country road. At that moment Travkin saw a knapsack on his back and a white bandage on his left arm.

A thought flashed through Travkin's mind that this German should be captured. It was not so much a thought as that impulse of the will which rises in every scout at the sight of a German. Then Travkin suddenly realized the connection between that white bandage and the cry that had startled the scouts during the night. The house by the lake was a German hospital. The tall German walking along the dirt road had been discharged and was on his way to his unit. *This was a German who would not be missed.*

Anikanov and Mamochkin were awake. Travkin went up to them and pointed to the tall figure flickering through the scattered trees.

"We must get that Jerry," he said.

The two men were surprised. Here was the lieutenant, usually so cautious, ordering them to capture a German in broad daylight. But Travkin pointed to the house.

"That's a hospital."

They saw the white bandage shining in the sunshine and understood.

They wakened the sleeping men and moved through the woods so as to cut across his path. He was marching along, whistling, evidently enjoying the spring morning. It was all extraordinarily simple. Little Golub, who had never before captured a "tongue", was quite disappointed. He did not even have a chance to touch the Jerry. The man had been bundled up and a cap thrust into his mouth for a gag before the excited Golub had time to realize what was happening.

In the thick grove of nut trees the German lay on the ground, his sharp nose pointing to the sky. The cap was removed from his mouth. The German groaned. Pronouncing the German words with a hard Russian accent, Travkin asked:

"Zu welchem Truppenteil gehören Sie?"[1]

"131 Infanterie-Division, Pioner-Compagnie," [2] the German replied. This was an infantry division holding the front line which the scouts knew well.

Travkin took a good look at the prisoner. He was a young man of about twenty-five, with flaxen hair and typical German watery blue eyes. Looking hard at those watery eyes Travkin asked his next question:

[1] To which unit do you belong?

[2] 131st infantry division, sapper company.

"Haben Sie hier SS-Leute gesehen?" [1]

"Oh, ja," replied the German, sounding as though he were glad to be so well informed, and looking at the Russians surrounding him with greater courage. "Eine ganze Menge überall." [2]

"Was sind das für Truppenteile?" [3] asked Travkin.

"Die Panzerdivision 'Wiking'. Eine sehr berühmte, starke Division. Auserwählte Himmlers Truppenteile." [4]

"Ah . . ." said Travkin.

The scouts realized that the lieutenant had found out something very important. Although he did not know the number of the Viking division or the object of its concentration here, Travkin could gauge the significance of the information he had gained. He looked almost with warmth at this lanky German and examined his papers. And the German, watching this young man, this Russian with something of sadness in his eyes, suddenly felt a gleam of hope: was it possible that this attractive lad could order him to be killed?

Travkin raised his eyes from the German's army papers and remembered that the man had to be finished off. As though sensing his thought the prisoner suddenly started, then said with great force and earnestness:

"Herr Kommunist, Kamrad, ich bin Arbeiter. Schauen Sie meine Hände an. Glauben Sie mir, ich schwöre; ich bin kein Nazi. Bin selbst Arbeiter und Arbeitersohn." [5]

Anikanov understood more or less the sense of what the German said. He knew the word "Arbeiter."

"There he is showing his calloused hands and saying: 'I'm a worker'," said Anikanov thoughtfully. "That means that he knows we respect working people, knows whom he's fighting, but he keeps on fighting all the same. . . ."

From his earliest years Travkin had been taught to love and respect working people, but this typesetter from Leipzig had to be killed.

[1] Have you seen SS men here?

[2] Oh, yes, there are a lot of them everywhere here.

[3] What units are they?

[4] The Viking armoured division. A very famous, strong division. Picked Himmler troops.

[5] Mr. Communist, Comrade, I'm a worker. Look at my hands. Believe me, I'm not a Nazi, I'm a worker and a son of a worker.

The German sensed both the pity and the inflexibility in Travkin's eyes. He was not stupid. Setting type he had read many wise books and he knew what kind of people were standing before him. And, seeing death in the form of this handsome youth with pitying and relentless eyes he burst into tears.

CHAPTER IX

What was taking place within their own hearts? They themselves could hardly have known. All that was irrelevant, all that was in the past had been wiped from their memories and if it ever returned now and then it was only in vague flashes. They lived in their task and thought of nothing else.

Anikanov and Golub led the way, followed at a distance of about forty metres by Travkin and Semyonov, carrying the transmitter; on their left, almost at the edge of the highroad running parallel to their course, were Mamochkin and Bykov, and on the right Brazhnikov guarded the group on the forest side. They formed an isosceles triangle with Travkin as the base and Anikanov the apex. Sometimes, sensing the proximity of Germans, the triangle closed in and moved more slowly, and the men would halt and listen intently to the nocturnal sounds. Anikanov gave a bird call and all stood frozen to the spot.

Lorries and tractors on crawler treads passed along the road to the left. They could hear German songs, German curses, German commands. Sometimes infantry would pass, and the soldiers' talk would be so distinct that they felt that by stretching out a hand they could seize a German, touch a German face, burn themselves on a German cigarette.

Travkin had firmly determined to take no more "tongues" for the present. He felt that now he was in the very centre of the enemy units. One careless movement, a half-stifled cry—and the whole SS horde would be upon them. He knew that the Viking SS tank division was concentrated here but he did not know its strength or its intentions. The strength he could gauge pretty correctly by counting the units, tanks and artillery, but the intentions of its command could only be known from a German who was better informed than the typesetter. Such a German must be found after they had taken a look at the railway station.

But Travkin's cautious plan was unexpectedly upset. He suddenly heard a noise to the left, then Mamochkin emerged from the darkness and reported in a whisper:

"There's a German lying here by the road. Drunk as a lord. . . ."

One glance at the "drunken" German told Travkin what had happened. The man had incautiously wandered into the thicket and been stunned and disarmed.

Mamochkin explained in some embarrassment.

"He ran right onto me. What could I do?"

There was no time for discussion. They seized the prisoner and dived into the forest. They could already hear the shouts of the Germans—strange to Russian ears—calling for their lost comrade: "U-hu-u-u-u! U-hu-u-u-u! Willibald! Willibald! Herr Benneke!"

The prisoner was laid on the grass beside the lake. Mamochkin splashed water over his face and did not even grudge him a little vodka out of his flask. He beamed and fussed about "his" German, praising him to the skies:

"Now that's a real SS man, he'll know everything... Look, Comrade Lieutenant, an officer, I swear, an officer!"

Yura Golub, examining the German with curiosity, wrinkled his little nose in disgust and said in despair:

"Everybody gets hold of 'tongues', and I still can't find one."

"Never mind, Golub," said Anikanov, listening tensely to the shouts fading in the distance. "Plently of that rabble round about here. You'll get your chance."

The SS Hauptscharführer was looking at Travkin in horror. Trembling and gasping he said that he was in the ninth Westland motorized regiment of the Viking SS tank division—that is to say, told what was in his army papers which Mamochkin had taken from his pocket. He said further that the Westland regiment consisted of three battalions, four companies each, that the "heavy arms regiments" had six and ten-barrelled mortars. There were no tanks in the regiment—and whether the other regiments had them he did not know. The division had come from Yugoslavia. Headquarters was in a village not far away but he did not know its name because he could not remember Russian and Polish names.

He remembered only "Moscow" and "Warsaw", he said in strangely challenging tones.

A slap in the face from his "patron" Mamochkin shattered the self-control which he had managed to collect for a moment and he howled like an animal. He feared Mamochkin worse than death. It was enough for the scout to stoop over him and the German would tremble and look imploringly at Travkin.

After the Hauptscharführer had been thrown into the lake Travkin established contact with Earth. This time conditions were excellent and he transmitted all the information he had gathered.

Judging by the voices coming from Earth, Travkin could tell that what he had to report was unexpected and considered very important. Finally a woman's voice spoke and he recognized Katya. She wished him good luck and a quick return.

"We're always thinking of you," she concluded in a voice trembling with agitation and pride in his success, and then, as though what she had said had direct bearing on the job on hand, she asked: "Did you understand? How did you understand me?"

"I understand," he replied.

Dawn found the scouts beside a railway halt, seven kilometres from the station they sought. This halt consisted of a one-story brick hut painted yellow and surrounded by a double barrier of thick pine logs. A similar protection had been set up on both sides of the small wooden railway bridge not far from the halt. By these means the Germans hoped to protect their communications from partisan raids.

A long column of lorries was drawn up before the halt, the rear machines stretching back to the forest out of which the patrol was emerging in this early hour. Through the deep silence they could hear a telephone ringing from the building and a coarse German voice.

After wandering in the forest for two days it was pleasant to see the railway line stretching into the misty distance, the semaphore and the black angles of

After making the scouts stop with the aid of the prearranged bird cry, Anikanov crawled to the last lorry and peered into the driver's cabin. It was empty. So were the second and the third. They were loaded almost to the top with empty flour sacks.

Anikanov returned and reported to Travkin.

"They've come to load," he said, "they're waiting for a train."

Travkin, too, decided to wait for the train but none appeared. After a little while sleepy drivers poured out of the building and began to disperse to their lorries talking idly.

Travkin could tell from fragments of conversation, plainly audible in the still morning air, that the lorries would be loaded not here but at the station, and that they were just about to start. After an instant's thought he decided to send two of his scouts to the station and have the rest wait for them here. The station would be alive with Germans, there was no sense in risking all his men.

He selected Anikanov and Bykov for the job, then yielded to Golub's pleading and sent him as a third.

"Hitch-hike, of course," said Anikanov in a businesslike tone.

The three men crawled up to the rear lorry and quickly clambered into it. Anikanov carefully covered Bykov and Golub with sacks, and then burrowed under them himself, leaving a small opening to look through and holding his tommy gun ready.

Soon the German driver came strolling up to the lorry. He took his place at the wheel, waited for the machine in front of him to move, switched on the ignition and pressed the starter. The engine hummed.

The column moved along the forest road, the lorries bumping over the ruts. Thus they drove for about fifteen minutes. Suddenly the driver stopped the lorry.

Anikanov heard German speech and saw the figures of two Germans pull themselves up over the side and jump into the body of the machine. Luckily for the scouts the Germans were evidently afraid of getting flour on their black SS uniforms, and remained sitting on the flap at the back, carefully avoiding the sacks. But all the same, they were unpleasant neighbours. The lorry bumped and swayed, and every now and then the outlines of human forms were discernible beneath the sacks. Anikanov began to feel uneasy. Their uninvited companions might be intending to accompany

them right to the station and that threatened serious difficulties.

A sudden commotion interrupted his thoughts. The lorry halted, there was much running to and fro, and the Germans sitting on the flap jumped down to the ground.

The next moment Anikanov heard the even hum of airplane engines. Instinctively he too ducked his head, but suddenly realized with a smile—ours! And as though Soviet bombs could do no harm to their own, he said gaily to his comrades peeping out:

"Hey, lads, those are our planes!"

There were six aircraft and they circled low over the forest, roaring menacingly.

Anikanov looked round. The Germans had all taken cover in the thickets. The agitated whistling of engines could be plainly heard. The station was quite near.

"Follow me!" Anikanov ordered, and they jumped down.

Diving amid the lorries the scouts tumbled into a ditch, clambered out and swiftly slipped into the forest. But during that one instant they had spent in the ditch, a German lying there had seen them, and after the first moment of startled silence he raised his head and shouted desperately:

"Fallschirmjäger!" [1]

Disorderly firing broke out. The scouts replied with several bursts from their tommy guns.

Dashing across a wide glade Anikanov saw Golub's face turn grey. Then the lad fell to the ground, wrinkling his small nose.

"We could have got that German . . ." he said lying on Anikanov's broad back.

Those were his first words after his wound, and the last in his short life. A dum-dum bullet had penetrated his chest below the heart. And although that poor heart was still beating, it was gradually becoming weaker. Later on he recovered consciousness once more and saw bending over him the lieutenant's tense face and Mamochkin's large eyes filled with tears.

A thunderstorm crashed over the forest. The oaks thick with young foliage groaned under the tearing gusts of wind, and a thousand trickles of water ran round their feet like mice.

[1] Paratroops.

Travkin sat motionless beside the dying Golub, awaiting Anikanov who had once again set off for the station, this time with Mamochkin. After this sorrowful incident Travkin had not wanted to split his group, but while Golub still lived he could not be left alone, and the job had to be done.

He tried to establish contact with Earth but without success. Perhaps the electricity in the air interfered. The ether howled in the earphones with dry cracklings.

Rivulets turned to streams underfoot and heavy drops fell on Travkin's shoulders. The torrential rain washed the last traces of dust and agitation from the lad's stiffened face and it gleamed in the darkness.

Anikanov and Mamochkin crawled up quite close to the station buildings. The constant flashes of lightning enabled them to see two freight trains. Huge, powerful tanks loomed on the platforms of one.

The engines puffed clouds of steam, scattering sparks on the rails. People were milling around the storehouses and the surrounding barbed wire, talking their sickening German. Then they could hear the sentries shout as they chased a group of peasant women carrying sacks away from the railway line. The scouts could hear the women's cries and complaints.

"Eh, the dogs, won't let ye go anywhere. . . ."

Anikanov was angry with himself. Why had he wanted to get into that blasted lorry? Maybe if he had not pushed himself in there Golub might still have been alive. He, a Siberian, used to the taiga, what had he wanted to get into a lorry for? . . .

The Germans were unloading the tanks. Evidently a big drive was coming. But the direction—that was the question. If they could get hold of one more German they might possibly find out the assignment of the SS division.

"Well, there they are, Germans walking about everywhere," thought Anikanov. "But which one of them knows that division's assignment? Get hold of some small fry, and again we'll find out nothing of importance."

Anikanov's attention was attracted by two thin, dried-up Germans in broad shining black caps. The lightning flashes showed them, now together, now separate

rapping out brusque orders, evidently in charge. These were obviously officers who had come in the car standing near the rear wall of the nearest storehouse.

Shivering under the downpour, Anikanov thought of Golub—was he still alive? Lying in the rain, poor lad. It would be fine to get a waterproof for him, like the ones these Jerries are wearing.

"Shall we grab an officer?" Anikanov asked Mamochkin.

"But the lieutenant?" the latter asked. "He didn't say we were to get a 'tongue'."

Anikanov carefully examined his comrade's face.

"We'll grab one in an instant," he said gently, "and then 'home' again at once."

Mamochkin started. They were two against hundreds of hurrying, busy Germans. And from among these hundreds they—the two of them—were to seize an officer?.. He shook. But Anikanov, still looking at him intently, repeated:

"We'll manage it in an instant...."

Mamochkin made a gesture of desperation, then taking a deep breath he rose. Filled with admiration for himself, he raised his face to the lashing rain, and said quickly, feverishly:

"Let's do it, Vanya... Let's do it! All right, Vanya, we'll manage it. We can't possibly fail, can we?"

They crawled up to the car and hid. The rain continued pouring down, lashing the polished chassis.

"I think one of these Jerries is a general," Mamochkin whispered, screwing himself up.

"Of course he's a general," Anikanov murmured soothingly.

At least an hour had passed when the sound of footsteps was heard, and one of the officers said:

"Wir fahren sofort!" [1]

He fell, struck down by Anikanov's dagger in his heart. The other one, stunned, his face pressed to Mamochkin's wildly heaving chest, lost consciousness.

The Germans round about continued hurrying from the warehouse to the train and back again, shivering under the streaming rain.

[1] We'll be leaving right away.

CHAPTER X

The fifth SS division, the Viking, was one of the supercrack divisions of the crack SS troops.

Under the command of Gruppenführer Herbert Hille, this division, comprising the 9th Westland Motorized Regiment, the 10th Germania Motorized Regiment, the 5th Tank Regiment, the 5th Mobile Artillery Brigade and the 5th Field Artillery Regiment, was concentrating secretly in this huge forest, in all the splendour of its first-class equipment. With a sudden drive it was to break the Russian ring encircling the town of Kovel, slice up the Russian forces into isolated groups, annihilate them, and drive them back to two famous rivers—the Stokhod and the Styr.

Recently the division had been raging with its usual ferocity in unsubdued Yugoslavia, stubbornly seeking Marshal Tito and his headquarters.

Having received strong reinforcements and sixty new Tiger tanks, which Herr Reichsminister Speer called the "King of Tanks", the division now numbered fifteen thousand men. The regiments were commanded by Standartenführer Müllenkampf who had been frequently cited by the Führer, by Standartenführer Gargeis, formerly Hitler's personal adjutant, and other Himmler wolves who stood high on the ladder of the National-Socialist and military hierarchy—ruthless, successful intriguers.

The 342nd Grenadier Division commanded by Lieutenant-General Nikkel—another crack division, though less outstanding than the Viking—was to follow on from France. This division was to develop the initial success of the troops.

All these operations were being carried out in the strictest secrecy.

"The Russians have driven too far into the Province," Gruppenführer Hille was told by his patron, von dem Bach, commander of an SS corps, who received Hille in his mansion on Pfauen Insel, near Berlin. "The results of their successful drive, Parteigenosse Hille, you can understand yourself. This will mean the activization of all the anti-German forces in Europe, and may even compel the English and Americans to act... The Führer attaches the greatest importance to your operation. Headquarters want the re-grouping carried out in

the deepest secrecy. Take all precautions."

Now, having concentrated his division in the dim forests west of Kovel, Hille was awaiting further orders, fully confident of the success of the operation entrusted to him. Of course, he knew that his division was far from what it had been in 1940, or even in 1943. It had been necessary to relax the principle of racial purity. Bitter though it was, he had Dutch and Hungarians, and even Poles and Croats serving in the division. True, these foreigners were tried supporters of the New Order, but nevertheless, they were men of alien blood, indifferent to the interests of the Reich. In addition to this, it had been necessary to relax the principle of excellent physique. The soldiers of the Black Corps were no longer the giants of six feet and over who had been selected from the whole of Germany. There were such insignificant specimens that it made Gruppenführer Hille sick to look at them. Inspecting the Germania Motorized Regiment, Hille had even seen with horror several men who had lost an eye, were lame, and even one with a hump; while half the regiment were undersized and sickly... Yes, these were not the Hitlerite Landsknechten, drunk with blood and easy plunder who had carried fire and sword through Holland and France, and reached even the Caucasus.

Herbert Hille found it pleasant to recall those days which now seemed so distant. He had liked the Caucasus best of all—the majestic beauty of that fabulous southern region outstripped Switzerland. At one time Herr Gruppenführer had even dreamed of a peaceful post as Governor or Stadthalter of these fertile mountain regions and had sounded the ground for such a lucrative appointment through his patron in the Führer's staff. But unfortunately, owing to circumstances known to the whole world, he had had to abandon these dreams.

It was strange, but he had felt a certain uneasiness from the very morning of that spring day. First of all, there had been those enemy aircraft. No, they had not dropped any bombs but they had conducted reconnaissance. The Russian planes examined the forest, followed the railway line several times, and circled for a long time over the station where the main unloading was carried on. True, the troops were well camouflaged but the very fact that the Russians were so interested in this place was disquieting.

His uneasiness became still more tangible when he heard that Hauptscharführer Benneke of Mecklenburg, a veteran and one of the best fighters in the Westland Motorized Regiment, had disappeared near the lakes during the night march. After a long search his body had been discovered in one of the smaller lakes, eight kilometres from divisional HQ. Herr Hauptmeister had a knife thrust in his heart and his head had been injured by some heavy object.

It was not surprising that the Gruppenführer connected the subsequent flight of Soviet aircraft over the headquarters village with the death of Benneke. He hastily transferred his headquarters to the forest and gave orders for it to be surrounded by a triple ring of barbed wire.

That evening—just as Staff-Surgeon Lindemann was reporting his examination of the body to the Gruppenführer, another report came in from the Westland Motorized Regiment that not very far from the regrettable incident with Hauptscharführer Willibald-Ernst Benneke, soldiers combing the forest had discovered another body in a thick nut grove—the body of Corporal Karl Hille of the 131st Infantry Division. (This unpleasant coincidence of names left a bad taste in the Herr Gruppenführer's mouth.)

A little later on Standartenführer Müllenkamp, commander of the Germania Motorized Regiment, telephoned personally to report that in a skirmish with mysterious unknown persons clothed in green two privates had been wounded—Gessner and Meissner, the former, it appeared, mortally. The Standartenführer further reported the curious fact that according to the soldiers' unanimous assertions the mysterious figures had been sprinkled with—snow.

The Gruppenführer ordered that each case be carefully investigated, and that a thorough search be made for the unknown persons; for which purpose a company was to be specially assigned from each battalion, and the whole divisional reconnaissance force was to be employed.

Among the soldiers—as the Gruppenführer discovered with dissatisfaction—panicky rumours were spreading about "grüne Gespenster" and "grüne Teufel" haunting these parts.

Gruppenführer Hille had no faith in the transcendental character of these spectres. He sent for Captain Werner in charge of reconnaissance and pointed out to him that there are no spectres in warfare but there is an enemy, and he instructed Captain Werner to take personal charge of the operations to discover the "spectres".

That night, at the very station where a tank regiment was detraining, two hours after the Gruppenführer himself had visited it. Sturmbahnführer Dille was killed and one of the chief quartermasters of the division, Obersturmführer Artur Bendel, was kidnapped. Poor Herr Dille had been killed by a knife thrust delivered with such force that the Sturmbahnführer's body had been pierced through. And this had happened almost within sight of a large number of officers and men busy at the station.

The Gruppenführer ordered fifteen days cells for the sentry and the officer on guard duty, then sent for Captain Werner and gave him a thorough dressing down for insufficient zeal in seeking the malefactors.

When a train loaded with ammunition crashed, most probably owing to the dilapidated condition of the rails, when three soldiers were poisoned by tainted food, when two deserters disappeared —all these cases were also attributed to the green spectres, and it became difficult to distinguish truth from fantasy, idle invention from fact.

Alarmed over possible consequences the Gruppenführer gave orders to inform the corps headquarters and Field-Marshal Busch commanding the central army group that the Russians had sent a unit of scouts-diversionists into the rear of the German troops, and that, owing to the laxity of the 131st Infantry Division, these scouts had penetrated into the centre of the Viking Division positions, and might quite possibly have discovered something of the objectives of the re-grouping.

After some thought Herr Gruppenführer also wrote a personal letter to Obergruppenführer von dem Bach in Berlin in order to amuse his patron and at the same time ensure his support in case the operation failed. There were quite a few generals in the Berlin reserve who would have been delighted to step into Herr Hille's shoes.

Towards the end of the next day when the Gruppenführer had lain down to rest after dinner, he was wakened by the telephone.

Captain Werner reported that there had just been a clash between a platoon and the green spectres. Combing the district according to the divisional commander's orders, this platoon under Untersturmführer Altenberg had come upon a lonely shed on the outskirts of the forest. Several men had entered but found no one. Thanks to the vigilance of the Untersturmführer, however, the green spectres had been discovered in the attic of the shed. Yes, they had been there. Unfortunately they had succeeded in escaping, after attacking Altenberg's platoon with hand grenades and killing the Untersturmführer and seven men. But in the first place, the alarm had been raised in all units in that district, and a real hunt had been organized for the green spectres; which it was hoped would end in their capture or destruction; secondly, one of these bandits had fallen into the hands of the soldiers: no, not alive, dead, unfortunately.

After some thought Hille ordered his car, and accompanied by a guard tank set off for the place where these events had occurred.

On the outskirts of the forest, beside the smouldering remains of a shed, Captain Werner and the SS men from the reconnaissance column met the Gruppenführer.

Without replying to their greeting Hille walked silently to the dead enemy. This was a young Russian, not more than twenty-three, with straight flaxen hair and large, wide, dead eyes looking calmly at Herr Gruppenführer. Beneath the green overalls ("Summer battledress of the Soviet reconnaissance," the Gruppenführer remarked) he was wearing a faded Soviet army tunic with the stripes of a junior sergeant.

A little distance away eight SS men lay side by side, as though on parade, arms crossed on their breasts. Herr Gruppenführer reflected with a frown that five out of these eight were short, sickly-looking... And those were soldiers of the SS Black Corps!

Travkin was quite unaware of having caused such a commotion among so many highly-placed personages in the German

army. True, as they moved in a triangle on their way back, the scouts would occasionally come upon groups of SS men sniffing about and hear them calling to each other, but he did not connect this with himself, thinking they were training.

On the evening of their fourth day in the German rear the scouts came upon a lonely shed. Travkin decided to give his men an hour's rest, and at the same time get in touch with Earth. For extra caution and in order to have a good view of the vicinity, they climbed to the attic up the rotting ladder—which nearly broke under Anikanov.

Travkin had tuned in and even exchanged signals with Earth, when he heard a sudden call from Brazhnikov who had been posted as sentry beside a hole in the roof. Travkin joined him and saw twenty SS men approaching the shed in extended order.

The lieutenant wakened his men who had only just fallen into a heavy sleep, thinking to jump down and slip into the forest, but saw that it was too late. The SS men were already quite close. Four of them entered the shed, poked about in the manure and emerged again but returned immediately, and one of them began to climb the rotting ladder, grumbling and cursing under his breath.

Travkin, a revolver in each hand, held his breath. Owing to the many holes and chinks in the roof, the loft was quite light. He looked his men over with greater care than ever before. Their appearance was terrible. Haggard, hollow-eyed, unshaven, they stood ready to fight to the death. The rotting ladder creaked, the German swore softly.

A fearful roar. Anikanov had tossed an anti-tank grenade through a hole in the roof among the SS men standing beside the shed. At the same time, with his tommy gun Brazhnikov split the head of the SS man as it emerged through the trapdoor and leaped down, followed by the other scouts, amid a cloud of dust and splinters.

In a flash, Travkin appreciated the genius of Anikanov's idea from a scout's point of view—hurling a grenade among the enemy standing outside and thus opening the way for retreat. The three SS men in the shed were easily dealt with—startled by the explosion they could make neither head nor tail of what was going on in the darkness.

A moment later the scouts raced to a thick grove of spruce, pursued by German shouts and bullets, and a belated grenade. At first Travkin did not notice that Brazhnikov was not with them, or that Anikanov and Semyonov were wounded. It was the panting Anikanov who told him about Brazhnikov; he had seen him fall as he ran out of the shed.

The pursuit did not die down. It seemed as though they were being hunted from all sides. Shots and shouts raised echoes through the whole forest. Then they heard the barking of dogs. Then the hum of motorcycles somewhere to the right. Anikanov, wounded in the back, was gasping. Semyonov began to limp more and more.

The rain-washed forest was filled with fragrance. The leaves and grass saturated with moisture were releasing their last April freshness still reminiscent of winter. This was real spring. A soft breeze that felt as though it, too, had been washed by the rain gently swayed the foliage which kept whispering its song of spring.

The sounds of pursuit died down and the wounded men were swiftly bandaged. Mamochkin took the last flask from his breast pocket and shook it. A trickle still remained. He handed the flask to Anikanov.

The transmitter on Bykov's back had been shattered by ten bullets. It had saved his life but it could no longer be used. Bykov finished it off with his tommy-gun butt and scattered the fragments in the bushes.

They walked on slowly, swaying like drunkards.

Mamochkin, walking behind Travkin, suddenly spoke.

"I ask your forgiveness, Comrade Lieutenant."

Striking himself on the breast and possibly weeping—it was difficult to tell in the darkness—he said in a low, hoarse voice:

"It's my fault, all my fault. It's not for nothing that our fishermen believe in fate. They're nearly always right. I didn't take those two horses to the village, I hired them out for food. . . ."

Travkin said nothing.

"Forgive me, Comrade Lieutenant. If we get back safely. . . ."

"If we get back safely, *you'll* go to the punishment company," said Travkin.

"Of course, *I'll go! I'll be happy to go!* And I knew *you'd say that! I knew that*

all the same you'd say that!" cried Mamochkin in admiration. And he wrung Travkin's hand in an almost hysterical fit of incomprehensible gratitude and self-oblivious love.

The pursuit sounded almost alongside them. They hugged the ground. Two armoured cars rumbled past. Then quietness descended and the men continued on their way. Ahead loomed the massive figure of Anikanov. Thrusting the branches aside with his mighty shoulders, he slowly advanced, fighting with a tremendous effort of will the fog of semi-oblivion that threatened to descend upon him.

It may be that only he, taught by the experience of a lifetime, guessed that the silence about them was deceptive. True, he did not know that the whole reconnaissance column of the Viking SS Division, the advance companies of the 342nd Grenadier Division and the rear units of the 131st Infantry Division were all hunting for them. He did not know that telephones were ringing continually, that radio transmitters were constantly talking in a harsh language of codes, but he felt that the noose of pursuit was tightening.

They walked along, their strength ebbing, not knowing if they would get away. But it was not this that was important now. The important thing was that the crack division with the menacing name of Viking, concentrated in this forest in order to deal an unexpected blow at the Soviet forces, was doomed. The lorries, the tanks, the armoured transporters, that SS man with the angrily sparkling pince-nez, those Germans with the cart carrying a live pig, all these Germans—eating, talking gutturally, fouling the forest, all these Hilles, Müllenkamps, Gargaises, all these careerists, these men in punitive detachments, these hangmen and murderers—all were marching along the forest straight to their doom; the avenging hand of death was already descending over all the fifteen thousand of them.

CHAPTER XI

The transmitter working on Earth was located in a lonely dugout. Junior Lieutenant Meshchersky spent his days and nights there. He slept hardly at all, only occasionally dropping his head onto his arms in a heavy semi-doze. But a moment later he would imagine that he heard the characteristic tension of the ether in his ears, and he would waken, blinking his long eyelashes, dazedly asking the operator on duty:

"Are they speaking?"

These operators worked in shifts. But Katya would not leave when her spell ended. She sat with Meshchersky on the narrow pallet, her light head resting on her sunburned hand, waiting. Sometimes she would argue angrily with the man on duty, insisting that he had lost the Star wave, snatch the instrument from his hand, and beneath the low roof of the dugout, her quiet, imploring voice would sound:

"Star. Star. Star. Star."

On a neighbouring wavelength someone was incessantly rumbling in German, and a little further away music and songs sounded from Moscow—ever awake, mighty and invulnerable.

Several times a day the divisional commander would come. Scouts loped to and fro between the dugout and the barn. Lieutenant Bugorkov came every day, sometimes accompanied by Lance-Corporal Mejidov. He would stand leaning against the wall for an hour or so silently watching the operator, and then leave again.

Major Likhachev frequently took the instrument from the operator on duty. Sometimes Captain Barashkin would come in for a few minutes and stand by the small window, drumming on it with his fingers and humming something from his famous notebook. Sometimes the inseparable Captains, Mushtakov and Gurevich, would visit them from the forward outposts.

Quiet, insignificant, slightly pock-marked, with observant eyes beneath a bulging forehead, the intelligence officer, Captain Yoskin, entered the dugout.

"Are you the reconnaissance commander?" he asked Meshchersky.

"I am acting commander."

The intelligence officer said that he had to interrogate several persons involved in an illegal requisitioning of horses from the peasants. He briefly outlined the case, and asked if Meshchersky realized the significance of this misdemeanour which undermined the prestige of the Soviet Army in the eyes of the local population.

"So you see," he continued, not waiting for Meshchersky's reply, "I must interrogate the scouts who were present at the

time this illegal act was committed, and particularly Lieutenant Travkin, and Sergeant Mamoohkin."

"They're not here just now," Meshchersky said with some impatience.

"None of them?"

"None."

The intelligence officer thought for a moment.

"But I must speak to them," he said. "Will they be back soon?"

"I don't know," Meshchersky replied slowly.

Katya suddenly came up and said:

"You'd better go where they are now, Comrade Captain, and interrogate them."

"And where are they?" enquired Captain Yoskin.

"In the German rear."

The intelligence officer sized Katya up with calm, humourless eyes. She met his gaze with an angry, proud smile.

Meshchersky also smiled, but suddenly realized that if his commanding officer ordered this man to go to the German rear to complete the investigation, he would go.

"This is where the strength of our army lies," thought Meshchersky. "Everyone does his duty."

On the third day Star spoke—for the second time since Travkin had crossed the front. Ignoring the code, Travkin repeated insistently:

"The Fifth Viking SS Tank Division is concentrating here. A prisoner from the Ninth Westland Motorized Regiment said that the Fifth Viking SS Tank Division is concentrating here."

Then he gave the force of the Westland Regiment, the location of divisional headquarters, and emphasized that the units were unloading and moving only at night. And again he repeated, repeated time and again:

"The Fifth Viking SS Tank Division is concentrating here, concentrating secretly. . . ."

Travkin's report produced a sensation in the division. And when Colonel Serbichenko himself telephoned Colonel Semerkin and the army commander, army headquarters, too, was excited.

Lieutenant-Colonel Galiev forgot what sleep was, answering telephone calls from corps, army and neighbouring divisional HQ. He stopped shivering with cold all the time and abandoned his coat somewhere. He became noisy, talkative, gay. "Galiev smells Germans," the men said.

Meanwhile on a thousand maps blue pencils had marked the district where the Viking Division was concentrating. From army headquarters this urgent report went to front headquarters, and from there to the headquarters of the Supreme Command in Moscow.

The Supreme Command to whom the Viking Tank Division and this whole forest region, for that matter, were just specks in the over-all picture, had its own far-reaching plans and did not want to permit the Germans the smallest operative gain which might—even for a day—hold up the drive of the Soviet forces into Poland. Orders were issued to strengthen the left flank of the front and transfer to it a tank army, a cavalry corps and several HQ reserve artillery battalions.

And so the circles extended around Travkin, ripples widening over the earth—as far as Moscow and as far as Berlin.

The immediate results for the division were the arrival of a tank regiment, a regiment of Guards mortars and big reinforcements in men and equipment. Reinforcements also came for the scouts.

Meshchersky commenced intensive training with his men and would spend half his time at the forward outposts observing the enemy. Bugorkov and his sappers mined No Man's Land. Major Likhachev was busy day in, day out, receiving new transmitters, telephones and wire. Colonel Serbichenko went to his observation post and from there guided the activities of the units. He seemed younger and grimmer as he always was before a big battle. Long and earnestly he studied the new maps which had just arrived, which took in almost the whole of Poland, right up to the Vistula. He had been in these distant parts before—with Budyonny's First Cavalry Army in 1920.

Only Katya remained in the lonely dugout.

What had been the significance of Travkin's reply to her last words over the radio? Had he said "I understand" in general, confirming what he had heard, or had there been a definite, secret meaning in his words? This more than any other was the thought that occupied her mind. She felt that surrounded as he was by deadly danger he might have become more accessible to simple human feelings.

And those last words over the radio might have been the result of such a change. She smiled at her thoughts. Borrowing a mirror from Assistant Army Surgeon Ulybysheva she gazed into it, trying to assume a gravely-solemn expression as befits—she even said those words aloud—the bride of a hero. Then laying the mirror down she again began repeating into the crackling ether, tenderly, gaily, sadly, according to her mood:

"Star. Star. Star. Star."

Two days after that memorable conversation, Star replied again.

"Earth. Earth. Star speaking. Can you hear me? Star speaking."

"Star! Star!" Katya exclaimed loudly. "Earth speaking. I can hear you, I can hear you."

She reached out her hand and flung the door wide open to call someone in to share her joy. But there was nobody near. She seized a pencil and prepared to write. But Star broke off in the middle of a word and said no more. All night long Katya stayed awake but Star was silent.

Star was silent also the next day and the day after. Occasionally Meshchersky would come into the dugout, or Bugorkov, or Major Likhachev, or Captain Yarkevich—the new chief of reconnaissance, in place of Barashkin, transferred. But Star was silent.

The whole day Katya half-dozing held the instrument to her ear. Strange dreams came to her—Travkin, very pale, in his camouflage overalls, Mamochkin—duplicated, with a frozen smile on his face, her brother Lenya—also in green camouflage overalls, for some reason. She wakened, trembling lest she miss Travkin's signal and again started calling into the instrument:

"Star. Star. Star. Star."

The thunder of artillery answered her from the distance, the roar of commencing battle. In those tense days Major Likhachev was badly in need of radio operators but he had not the heart to remove Katya from her vigil at the apparatus. And so she remained, nearly forgotten, in the lonely dugout.

Late one evening Bugorkov entered. He brought a letter for Travkin from his mother, which had just arrived. The mother wrote that she had found his red notebook for physics, his favourite subject. She would take good care of it. When he entered college he would find it very useful. It really was a fine notebook, it could have been published as a textbook, the tables of electricity and heat were so carefully made out. He had a bent for science, and she was very glad of it. By the way, did he remember that clever water-mill which he had made when he was twelve? She had come across the blueprints and had a good laugh with Aunt Klara over them.

Bugorkov read the letter aloud. Then suddenly hunching over the radio with a sob he said in a choked voice:

"If only the war would end... No, I'm not tired. I'm not saying that I'm tired. But it's time for people to stop being killed, high time."

Suddenly Katya realized with horror that perhaps her vigil here was useless, and her endless calls for Star. The Star had set, it was extinguished.

But how could she leave? Suppose he spoke again? What if he were hiding somewhere in the depths of the forest?

And filled with hope and an iron determination, she waited. Nobody else waited, but she did. And nobody ventured to remove the apparatus until the advance began.

CONCLUSION

In the summer of 1944 the troops sweeping before them the weakly resisting German army, entered Polish territory.

Major-General Serbichenko in his jeep overtook a group of scouts. One after the other, they were walking along the side of the road in their green camouflage overalls, light, alert, ready at any moment to disappear, to merge with the silent fields and forests, with the uneven ground, with the flickering shadows of the dusk.

In the scout of the head of the group the general recognized Lieutenant Meshchersky. The general stopped his car, as always at the sight of scouts.

"Well, how about it, lads?" he asked. "Warsaw's on the horizon. And see, only five hundred kilometres left to Berlin! A fleabite. We'll soon be there."

He mustered the scouts, then caught by some sad memory wanted to add something but checked himself and waved his hand.

"Good luck, scouts!"

The car started, and the scouts, after waiting for a moment, resumed their march.

Translated by Eve Manning

In the new Moscow

Yu. Pimenov

604

VADIM LUKASHEVICH

LAST SUMMER

Nothing remained of my town except blackened stoves, fragments of walls with tattered pink wallpaper and ashes. I had seen it myself.

My parents were dead. My former friends I would probably meet only in some train. And for that matter, even that burned-out town was not my real home; my parents had been always on the move—restless people they were.

The worst of all was that I could not return to my company, to the comrades with whom I had fought.

Nevertheless, it was fine to be starting life anew. I would wake up smiling as though a child again.

"You know, lad," said the doctor, "savages in your case take a new name—they say that it's a new life starting."

In the evenings, as dusk was falling, I dreamed of the coming happiness—to go out into the free, sunlit world.

True, I was pretty helpless now; it was especially difficult to open a door when carrying something.

Oh, to hell with it, I wasn't going to worry about anything! Come what might, I was alive!

The man in the next bed had told me about this place. He would talk for hours about the river, the forest, the hayfields; his face wore a happy smile and I felt that there was still much more that he was not telling me. Then he left for the army and I went to the hospital office. "Have you relations there?" asked the nurse without raising her head—she was very busy. "Yes!" I answered.

The compartment window in the train was open and the smoke from the engine seeped in, reminding me of the smell of campfires. Strangers kept offering me tea; I drank from metal mugs that scalded my lips, and from thick glasses. The women would shyly hand me homemade village buns. I was not hungry but I did not want to hurt them by refusing. Talk was of the weather, of the wolves that had increased and had become a problem again during the war. The forest murmured and sang at the halts.

I left the train at a small station. Actually, there was no station left, only stone walls without roofs or windows, and piles of scorched bricks visible through the empty doorways.

I jumped right down onto the grass; a bitter, damp fragrance rose from the crushed blades. There was a mingled smell of fresh cucumbers, watermelons and damp hay. I had some difficulty in finding a track in the thick growth.

Every now and then I had to adjust my knapsack which continually slipped to the side and cut my shoulder.

A THIRD IN THE HOUSE

From a distance the tall old trees seemed to be crowding close to the pond murmuring in the wind. But as I approached I saw a shingled roof half hidden in the simmering leaves. It was the cottage belonging to Granddad Larion, whom I had heard about in the Village Soviet.

The old man's welcome was not particularly gracious.

"So you want to stop here with us?" he said, looking over my shoulder. He thoughtfully scratched his chin through his beard—it was streaked and thin, like a bush in autumn.

"Well, all right, you can live here. Only as for cooking and washing—you'll have to manage as best you can. My daughter died during the German occupation. I live here with my grandson, Vassili."

Granddad Larion smiled.

"He's a bright lad but he's spoilt," he said affectionately. "Other people are ploughing and reaping and he's always got his nose stuck in a book."

Darkness came early inside the cottage, screened as it was by the trees. I went out onto the porch. The sun was sinking. A swallow swooped by with a chirp; its belly was white like that of a fish.

A boy in a washed-out blue shirt was sitting on the top step, absorbed in a thick book lying on his knees. Hearing my footsteps he clapped his palm onto

the rustling page and raised his head. I saw a serious, sunburned face.

"Hello!" he said softly.

"Good evening. That's a big book you've got there!"

"It's a story by Leo Tolstoy, it's called *War and Peace*," said the boy slowly, lowering his eyes.

"How old are you?"

"Twelve."

"And you're reading Tolstoy?"

"I don't read everything all through, only the parts about the fighting."

There was a distant rumble. I seated myself beside the boy.

"The river's quite near here, isn't it?"

"How do you know?"

"Didn't you hear a cart just crossed the bridge!"

"But that was thunder!" the boy laughed. "There's no bridge here and the river isn't over there. It's that way." He pointed to the right where a clump of elders was growing.

"A big river?"

"Not so awfully big. But it's cold—it makes your teeth chatter when you bathe in it."

"Are there any fish there?"

"There's lots. You should see them rising after rain!"

"I suppose you do a lot of fishing, Vassya?"

"No. There aren't any hooks in the shop."

We were silent.

"Uncle, do you remember the Battle of Borodino," said Vassya softly.

"I wasn't even born then. That was a very long time ago," I laughed.

"Maybe you've read about it... There he stands—that Bolkonsky, and all of a sudden a grenade falls. Everybody shouts to him to lie down but he doesn't. Grand!"

"Nothing but a lot of stupid show-off," I said disgustedly. "It just means losing a man for nothing."

"Have you been in many battles, Uncle?"

It happens that way—you just can't talk about your misfortune and people who keep asking about it become a nuisance. But then a time comes and you begin to talk. I don't know why it was that I told Vassya the whole story—how we ran from the ravine to the attack, how a mortar shell exploded and I fell; it was later that I found I was badly wounded but then as I fell I was thinking—now that blasted Jerry'll be glad to think he's killed another! And that made me so angry that I cursed and said: "That's a lie, damn you, I'm going to live!" And it was quite right, I did live.

I talked, fell silent, smoked, and looked at the trampled ground by the porch. Vassya sat unstirring. I threw away my cigarette end.

"How determined you are, Uncle," said Vassya, and then added shyly: "I like determined people. . . ."

I raised my head. Vassya was looking at me, his eyes glowing. I suddenly felt gay.

"Are you awfully sorry about that?" the boy asked suddenly, touching my empty sleeve gently.

"Eh, Vassya, lad," I replied, putting my arm round the boy. "Don't you think it's good to be alive? Just look round!"

I pointed. Shadows were already falling along the rye and stealing through the bushes; only the tree tops still caught the sunshine. Against the sombre mass the rosy trunks of birches and dark-red pines stood out, and from the road beyond the pine cluster a bright light shone like a torch, casting long shadows from the poplars along its borders. Beside the porch grew a young pine; its branches with their long green fingers were tilted upwards as though testing the weight of something.

"Granddad Larion came out onto the porch.

"It's a fine bit of country, ours!" he cried gaily. "Splendid forests! And another thing, I don't know if you've heard, maybe not, there's a root that grows round our way, it's red inside, and anybody that eats it gets young again. . . ."

"Ginseng, isn't it?" I said in surprise. "But no, that's in the Far East!"

"No, it's called dolgan. It's true, what I'm telling you. A forester I know told me—last autumn he was going through the woods and he saw a man digging. He went up quietly, and it was the Khoroshevo chemist, Moisei Osipovich. 'What are you digging for here, Moisei Osipovich?' he asked, and Moisei told him: 'I'm digging up medicinal roots.' So there you are!"

"You should have asked him for some of the root," I said smiling.

"You think I didn't ask him? Of course, I did!" said the old man excitedly. "But our chemist's a mean one! He just keeps on giving me those drops for

rheumatism, and they're bitter and smell like mice. Pah!"

I could no longer contain myself and laughed out loud. Granddad was offended.

"So you laugh at me, do you?" he asked, rising. "Hardly out of your cradle and laughing at your elders!"

Muttering under his breath, he went back into the cottage.

I felt a small hand on my knee.

"Don't be angry, Uncle," said Vassya softly. "Granddad's all right."

THE BRIBE

In the morning Granny Alena arrived. She sat down on the bench by the door, her hands in her lap and talked about the weather, the harvest, and how Granddad Larion's back ached in season and out, and how the only time when Granny Alena's feet were warm was in summer if she wore winter felt boots. But all this was only the frills. We were waiting.

"I can't get on any longer without timber," said Granny Alena. "Not anyway, I can't! I need to change three beams, and mend the roof, and it 'ud do no harm to make two steps at least—I have to get down from the porch backwards, like a little child."

"Write an application to the Village Soviet," said Vassya.

"That's right!" Granddad Larion agreed. "He'll write it for you. A bright lad."

"I took an application to the Village Soviet," Granny Alena continued. "But what's the good? I'm naught to the chairman—not his wife nor his sister, nor any relative of his. . . ."

"But . . ." I tried to interrupt, but Granny Alena did not listen to me.

"I bought him half a litre of vodka," she said.

Vassya avoided my eye, he hung his head and played with his belt; his ears were glowing red. Granny Alena sat there like a sorrowing Virgin on an icon.

"Well, and what happened?"

"He didn't take it," said the old woman mournfully, a bright senile tear rolling slowly down her cheek. Vassya and I exchanged glances and quietly chuckled at Granny's sorrows.

"Eh, deary dear!" said Granddad Larion in surprise. "Didn't take it? Didn't want vodka? Eh, dear!"

Vassya and I spent the day fishing.

The sun was not shining that day but the warmth was seeping through the clouds. The sand along the water's edge was darkened as it sloped down into the river; and there the reflections of the clouds were drifting along the surface concealing the red sandy bottom. Further along, the high grassy bank and the trees were mirrored in the water. But through all these reflections the dark shapes of the underwater vegetation could be seen.

In the places where the green tops of the waterweeds came near the surface, the water broke in bright little ripples. From the fields up on the high banks the wind was blowing, and long silent waves were running up to the sand, retreating, and meeting new waves; and this movement brought the quivering play of sky, bank and clouds. The whole river was a pattern of small circles: here a dragonfly would touch the surface with its wings, there a tiny fish would hop out of the water and back again, now a midge would settle on the surface, or a grass seed or a flake of down descend onto it. Sometimes a yellow willow leaf would appear and float past and then one could see that the current was rapid.

We came home smelling of fish and wormwood. Vassya was carrying the can filled with perch and roach. The striped cat Fomka ran out from the neighbouring house to meet us and stood right in our path mewing piteously. It was impossible to get rid of him—he would run on in front, then turn, circle us and follow behind, loudly demanding tribute.

In the afternoon Granny Alena appeared and told us that to her surprise the chairman had issued timber, and the planks had been brought right to her cottage. She was beaming, with innumerable lines and wrinkles crisscrossing her face as though she had been baked in a stove.

"It's always that way with you," said Vassya reproachfully. "Just saying bad things about people."

Granny Alena was so pleased about the timber that she was not angry—she was even rather embarrassed.

"E-e-eh, lad!" she said. "Is it my fault? Fifty years ago I was all nice and sweet but then life pickled me like a cucumber in a barrel. And I got sour."

"Pickled cucumber is a tasty bit!" Granddad Larion laughed, opening a large mouth, bordered by a thicket of beard and displaying his only tooth.

"Well, that's how it was," said Granny

Alena. "I didn't think to see uryadniks[1] never no more, and then those stinkers came along."

"Stinkers" was the name Granny had given to the fascists, and we knew that the next moment she would be telling us how when the Germans were there that Judas the village elder had ordered her to hand in a hundred eggs from two hens. Did he think she could lay them herself?

It was not the first time we had heard that story so I gave Vassya's sleeve a quiet tug, and he, the clever lad, suddenly cried:

"Uncle Dima! Uncle Dima! We must go and see to the creel or somebody may take the fish."

Granny was alert in a moment.

"And what do you think?" she said. "Of course, they will. And not think twice about it."

The next moment Vassya and I were out of the door and in the porch. And when we passed with our lines a minute later I could hear Granny Alena asking:

"Spent money on that vodka all for nothing. What'll I do with it now? Your lodger, now, does he drink?"

"Eh, he's a grand one for that," cried Larion enthusiastically. "He'll down that litre like ye'd drink a mug of kvass."

I halted in sheer amazement. The old devil! But Vassya tugged my shirt.

"Uncle Dima! Come on quick!" he begged. "Or Granddad'll remember that I didn't wash the bowl."

We walked through the meadow to the river marked by a line of willow tops.

THE NEIGHBOUR'S CAT FOMKA

The neighbour's striped cat Fomka had taken to accompanying us. He would sit down on the bank beneath the elm and watch while we fished, twitching his tail impatiently. Vassya was convinced that he watched the float but I thought that Fomka was dreaming of catching one of the blue dragonflies hovering just over the water. When one of them touched the surface, leaving a small widening ring of ripples, Fomka would start. Every now and then he would blink and yawn displaying a pink tongue but we knew that this was just a pretence; actually, Fomka was desperately excited.

We gave the cat the tiny bleaks and roach that swallowed our bait. Fomka would eat them crunching the bones and purring. The larger fish we put into a tin filled with water and closed the lid. The biggest ones swam in the river fastened to a line.

If we were not looking, the cat would steal up to the tin and peer through the narrow slit with glowing eyes. He would try to insert a paw but the opening was too small. Then Fomka would begin rubbing his head against the tin, ears laid back, purring softly, as though exhorting the fish not to be coy.

Today Vassya saw Fomka rubbing himself against the tin and spat in disgust.

"A real Jerry," he said.

Watching the float, Vassya began telling me how the Germans, after torturing a partisan to death, had set up the dead body at a fork in the road. They had fastened it to a stake, the kind used to hold up apple-tree branches, and there the dead man stood, a board with the inscription: "I was a partisan," hung on his chest.

In the village the Germans had pasted notices on the gates, trying with all kinds of promises to persuade the partisans to come out from the forest and lay down their arms.

"But none of us believed their promises, not one," said Vassya, then cried suddenly: "A bite! A bite!"

My float jerked as though startled by the shout; I gave it a sharp tug and then pulled. A red-speckled roach rose and fell onto the bank, flapping. Fomka and Vassya made a simultaneous dash for it.

The cat was first but I raised the rod, and the fish hung flapping in the air with the cat stalking on its hind legs underneath, clapping its forepaws.

"Like a circus!" laughed Vassya, when we had finally fastened the fish to our line and left it to swim by the bank.

Silence fell. The floats lay motionless on the water and a blue dragonfly alighted on Vassya's.

I glanced at Fomka out of the tail of my eye. He was sitting beside the swimming roach, looking deeply injured.

"Vanka and I wanted to kill a German," said Vassya unexpectedly. "But Granddad wouldn't let us. He said if you've been given a job then do it, and don't try to go ahead of your elders."

"What was your job?" I asked, interested.

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[1] Uryadnik—tsarist police officer, well hated by the peasants in the old days.

"We wrote, Vanka and I."

"What did you write?"

"All sorts of things. The communiqués from our front. The Orders of the Day from Supreme Headquarters. And then just our own stuff—not to give in to the Jerries, the Red Army would soon be coming. We wrote what they gave us."

"Who gave it you?"

"The partisans, who do you think? They had a radio. They listened and wrote it all in a letter to Granddad. And then Vanka and I, we'd make a lot of copies and leave it about where the folks 'ud see it and read it."

"Swell lads!"

"Nothing swell about it. We didn't kill a single Jerry. And writing — anybody could do that. Granny Alena's the only one here that can't read and write. She hasn't any glasses, so she's forgotten how."

In the evening we managed to catch a pike. We played it a long time, and Vassya had to undress and go into the water but in the end the pike lay on the bank. . . .

Darkness was falling when we returned home. Fomka brought up the rear, gazing covetously at the dark, spotted pike tail twitching on the ground.

Granddad Larion met us in high spirits.

"Here's hunters!" he cried gaily. "Brought a wild cat along!"

"Well, all right," we said trying not to look offended. "We'll split—the cat for Granddad and the fish for us."

Vassya advanced with the pike, panting exaggeratedly as though with the effort of carrying it.

"Granddad, give me a knife," he asked.

Granddad gasped when he saw the pike, squatted down and poked its spotted side.

"What a monster!" and making handsome amends: "No denying it—real fishermen!"

While Vassya cleaned the pike and Fomka purred over the entrails Granddad told his story.

"I went to Khoroshevo today, to the chemist. Moisei Osipovich was glad to see me. Nobody's ill these days, he said, no time for it but he can't close the shop. He just sits and thinks. Makes one laugh! 'Listen, Larion,' he says, 'why do they say—rain's coming? Rain's got no feet. Rain falls.' And I tell him, 'Listen, Moisei, that may be right in the towns, that rain falls, but in our parts you can see how it comes. Three days ago, now, I was standing in the forest. It was all quiet, not even a bird whistling. And then I heard a rustling to the right, and then to the left, and in front. I even jumped. And then a drop fell on my face and I knew it was the rain. Yes. And I tell you the clouds go about the sky and the waves go along the river. There's even a rhyme about it—'A cloud moves in the sky, a cask floats on the sea waves. . . .'"

"That's by Pushkin!" said Vassya. He had lighted a fire between two bricks and was frying the fish on a large pan. The fire smoked and Vassya and I turned away listening.

"But did he give you the root?" I asked teasingly.

"No, he didn't!" cried Granddad. "I told him—'Shame on you Moisei Osipovich! If I could get rid of ten years, I'd be able to work. It's losing a man for the collective farm.' And he laughed! 'It's not in my power,' he said, 'to get rid of years, but as for your rheumatism,' he said, 'I'll cure that for you. They've sent me. . .' Scat, you devil!"

A terrible yell sounded behind us. We looked round, startled. Fomka had at last sneaked up to the fish. But the frying pan was hot, the cat had got well burned and was streaking away, spitting and swearing. The village dogs replied with loud barking.

Vassya touched the fish with a twig.

"Ready!" he announced.

"Eh!" said Granddad, combing his beard with some embarrassment. "That's a grand dish! What do you say, isn't there some of Alena's vodka left?"

"How'd it be left?" I replied. "I can down that half litre like you or Granny drink a mug of kvass!"

The old man laughed.

"Each one to his own taste," he said. "Apples and sweets for him, for you mebbe the girls, but for an old man like me, that vodka's the best of all. It helps my rheumatism."

"Well, if it's good for rheumatism!" I replied.

So there was nothing for it but to go out into the pantry where Granny Alena's half litre was standing.

ANYUTA

The sun was already high in the sky when we came to the river and sat down under the elm. The tree soared up in five trunks, its dark round leaves closely

woven together moving only faintly and reluctantly in the wind, while on the other side of the river, the willows rustled and whispered. The shadow under the elm was solid, broken only by a few rare sunspots.

This year the dragonflies, butterflies, flies and grasshoppers were particularly numerous, and the foliage seemed to be riddled with gunshot, while in some places only the veins of the leaves remained. Pale green caterpillars like transparent boiled sweets swayed on invisible threads. If you touched them, they would roll into a pill. For some reason the wind had torn down many healthy green leaves. The grass was littered with them, I could hear them rustling.

A splash. That was a predatory fish hunting. Two falcons circled high in the sky. One of them called on a thin high note as though somebody had plucked the fine string of a violin, and the eerie sound floated slowly away in the sky.

"Uncle Dima, you won't be mad, will you?" Vassya asked shyly.

"Why, what's the matter?"

I got out the tin of worms.

"Granddad's been saying... Well, he's been telling people all over the place that you ... that you captured... Oh, what's his name? Paulus, or something...."

"What? Paulus?"

I dropped the tin and it rolled into the water, rattling and spilling out the worms. Vassya dashed to save them.

"What the devil!" I cried. "There'll be no fishing today. I'll give him Paulus!"

I made straight for the cottage through the tall grass bright with flowers and filled with the humming of bees and flies. Vassya came running after me, troubled and upset, tins and hooks rattling.

"Uncle Dima! Uncle Dima! Granddad didn't mean any harm by it! I told him he oughtn't to tell lies, that you'd be angry. But he said: 'What's he got to be offended about, I'm not saying he was in the German police!' Uncle Dima, it's because Granddad wants everybody to think you're a hero. And he wants them to think a lot of you, because you're a fine chap, he says... Granddad only said that you're very quiet and modest...."

"He did, did he! I'll show him how quiet I am!"

The devil! So that was why all the lads and girls had started visiting Granddad! And when I came in the fellows would all stand up respectfully and the girls would nudge Granddad and whisper. I'd even heard them saying: "Just think! And to look at him—just an ordinary fellow, like anybody!"

The worst of it all was that the previous evening I'd met some girls—Anyuta and—I forgot the other one's name.

I dashed home, crimson with heat and rage, wanting to get hold of Granddad at once. I'd let him know! But the old man was not at home and there was Anyuta standing on the porch.

"Good day!" she greeted me.

I halted in front of the steps, panting. Behind me stood Vassya with the tins.

"It's all a lie!" I shouted. "I never even was on the Stalingrad front. And I never said I'd captured Paulus. It's allnonsense. I don't want you to think, Anyuta...."

Anyuta shrugged her shoulders.

"Don't worry about it," she said in her deep, musical voice. "What does it matter?"

"But you think I was bragging...."

"I don't think anything of the kind. Give me the rod!"

She took it and handed it to Vassya, saying: "Put it in the porch." Then Anyuta turned to me.

"If you're not in a hurry, let's sit here a bit. Do you want to?"

She seated herself on the top step, and I on the one below, feeling the drops of sweat tickling my cheeks as they slowly rolled down.

"Where's the old man?"

"He's gone to the collective farm. He's tired of having nothing to do. He wants to keep bees."

"His lying'll choke them!"

Anyuta laughed. Then a sudden thought struck her.

"You know what? Let's go to the mill. They're starting it working today. The Germans blew it up but the collective farm's built it again. Come along! Vassya, you come too!"

Vassya appeared in the doorway.

"I... I don't know." He looked at me.

"We need some worms dug," I growled, avoiding his eye.

"What's the good of digging worms now!" cried Anyuta, rising. "You dig worms in the morning."

So all three of us went.

The forest began. Two lonely pines stood

over an old cutting, thickly grown with young birches, larches and occasional spruce. The two pines had turned away from each other, as though they had quarrelled, bending in opposite directions, and like bristles on a brush, their branches were growing on one side only: on one, all the branches were facing East, on the other they all faced West. There was something mournful in those hostile, lonely, stooping trunks as they swayed in the wind.

Vassya continually disappeared. Anyuta stopped and called: "Vassya! Hey! Where are you?" and a faint echo answered her. Anyuta continued calling. At last the bushes rustled, and a gloomy Vassya emerged with a handful of wild raspberries. Anyuta held out her hands and offered me some berries. Her palms had a faint, nice smell of smoke and milk.

We went on. Vassya, looking sadly after us, disappeared again into the bushes.

It was damp here in the forest. The previous day's rain had left pools in every hollow of the road. It was as though age had worn holes in the earth, and through them, the sky could be seen; and where the holes were not worn right through there were terrible black depths and reflections of the trees.

"This is grand," I said.

"Yes, it's good here," Anyuta replied. "Only now the forest's like the village when the Germans were there—corpses standing about. Look over there!"

Anyuta pointed to broken, dried trees in the rustling green wood. She showed me torn-up roots, dead and rotting, with wet green moss creeping over them. The yellowing skeleton of a spruce like that of a fish lay across our path.

Suddenly Anyuta brightened.

"There's something I want to ask you," she said. "An old man told me that people invented roses. Before that there were only the wild ones. Is that true?

"I've heard it too."

"Well just think of that!" cried Anyuta. "All the lovely things hidden all round!"

The tall, dark forest was left behind. Before us, some huge trees crowded on top of a mound, their knotted roots binding the earth like ropes. Age had covered the birches with knots and lichen, and the willows were splitting.

I ran up the slope and barely stopped myself in time; there was water right at my feet—the edge of the dam. Here it was black and still with water lilies floating on the surface and an occasional water spider running over it, leaving tiny ripples.

At the mill large logs were lying among the splinters and shavings. I could see the drops of dried resin looking like clear melted butter. An old man in a cap with a huge peak and a small top was fussing about the logs; his grey hair had grown long, it curled up from under his cap. He turned round, the sun glinting on the rims of his glasses like bright drops running along the steel.

"The shaft's stiff," he said. "We shan't start it today. The chairman said better to wait and have the whole thing working right at once."

"Oh," said Anyuta, disappointed, "And I'd brought some one to see it."

The old man held out his hand.

"How do! I'm Ivan Pakhomovich Vityugov, master carpenter and cabinet maker. Would you like to see round?"

He led us to see the shaft which would turn the pinion; the pinion was set on a shank which stood on a lift. The old man mouthed the words with pleasure. Flickering lights played on the ceiling, the reflections of the water penetrating through cracks in the wall and through the small unglassed window. It was cool here, and damp. Outside, the stream was chuckling as it rushed past, and the mill vibrated slightly.

"You see, further on, the shank encased in the lower millstone grips the upper one closely and is fastened there."

For a long time he led us about the mill explaining everything.

"But don't you get tired of this and want some finer work, Ivan Pakhomovich?" I asked.

"No, I don't," said the old man. "I'll tell you—fine work is gingerbread, but the work that's needed—that's good wholesome rye bread. You can't fill yourself with gingerbread. Well, now, say I've made a set of shelves, all varnished and nice. I put it in the Village Soviet or in the reading room. And that's all. But there's folks coming here, if you reckon it up; from sixteen villages, and every one of them with a good word for Vityugov. It gladdens my heart to be doing something useful for the state!

"The Germans made a mess of all our gardens and orchards," said the old man, "or I'd have treated you to some of our 'culepan' apples, long ones, they were, rosy-cheeked. They won't keep the winter through but they taste right good now."

As we left, we heard an axe ringing behind us.

"If you explain it all at length, even a cart sounds a complicated machine," I said.

"Of course," Anyuta caught me up. "There are some carts that seem to run by themselves, and quiet as a cradle. It depends on the craftsman."

"Yes, I can see he knows his job."

"He's a real craftsman!" Anyuta insisted enthusiastically. "And proud. When the Germans were here he never picked up a tool. He told all the folks not to say what he was and went as watchman in the bathhouse at Khoroshevo. Our folks would bring him something so he wouldn't starve. There's a saying of his, what is it. . . Yes: you can get tired of anything but work."

"Depends on the work," I said dubiously.

"Whatever it is!" Anyuta insisted warmly. "That's if you don't do it badly but use your head. Only—to work for the Germans—that was worse than death. You know, when they were here we just ached for our own work. . . ."

We were already entering the forest when Anyuta stopped.

"But where's Vassya?"

"He's probably gone home."

"Oh, that's not good. . ." And there was reproach in Anyuta's voice.

"He got bored with us and he went off," I said uncertainly. Anyuta shook her head and sighed.

In the evening, nevertheless, I asked Granddad Larion why he had told that lie about Paulus. The old man laughed.

"What are you fussing about? It's nothing bad. . . You can't go on all the time sitting about with a kid and a cat. And the girls like a hero, someone that's done things."

"But they'll find out that it's a lie!"

"Let them. It's not you that told it, but me. You're too timid. Got to do something to make the girls look at you. And then when they know you, they'll stay anyway. Women like them that's kind."

"Granddad," I implored, "do me one favour, don't tell any more lies about me."

"What's it to me? If you don't want it, it's your business. Stop with your cat, you daft lad." And the old man asked for some tobacco.

Vassya was washing the dishes; and I have never yet known anyone take so long with two bowls and three spoons.

"Now as for me, you can lie all you like," said Granddad, lighting a cigarette. "All the same to me. So long as you don't call me a German policeman, or lazy. If you do that I'd wring your neck for it's slander.

When you go out into the garden in the evening, it's like being by the sea. Open spaces, a far horizon. Rosy streaks of sunset and a fresh breeze. The neat birch fence round the garden is like the rail of a ship. You seem to be sailing through the dark space—who knows where? There are only the stars shining overhead.

A HOT DAY

Today haymaking began. Vassya was away to the hayfield almost before it was light. Only Granddad Larion was left sitting gloomily on the porch. Nodding to me he asked for some tobacco.

"Here's a bad job," he said. "My back's aching so that I can't stand it. That means rain. And they're getting in the hay. What'll I do?"

His moustache twitching, he sucked at the cigarette he had rolled, and added through a puff of smoke:

"All the folks are in the fields. We're the only ones idle. . . ."

The pines and spruce stood motionless with only an occasional slight movement of their branches, but the larches danced continually as though there were a breeze for them alone.

I wandered into the forest and realized with surprise that I was bored.

"We're the only ones idle," Granddad Larion had said. There he was, an old man and sick, yet he was bored without work. If only I knew that there was something I could do.

After all it was rotten to be wandering about here alone when everybody was working.

Larch twigs swayed like a child waving its hand in farewell.

And here was a little green spruce prickly like a fish—it was the pine tree's baby.

It looked as if I was going to the meadow, all the same.

The trees thinned out and beyond them I saw the meadow where rain was beginning to fall. Clouds were rolling up in the distance. There was the even hum of rain broken by the heavy thuds of drops falling from the trees; they made dark shining spots on the path like oil. The air was getting damper.

The wind died down and the rain gradually stopped.

Then the wind rose again and hard drops hit the lower leaves, the bushes and the burdocks. With every breeze the moisture would come pattering down, then as it died away there would be an occasional drop falling here and there.

Before the rain had completely stopped flies were humming gaily and a butterfly drifted past through the last fine mist. The sun peeped out and the humming and singing rose in different notes as black specks filled the air.

When the wind was still the air was warm and damp on my face. There was a smell of rotting leaves and moisture. Grasshoppers began to rasp, and last of all a lark struck up its endless song.

The birds were chirping loudly and regularly in the forest after the rain, as though hard at work, beating with a tiny hammer on a strip of steel—now in the middle, now at the edge.

The path followed the outskirts of the wood. It was bordered with young pines and larches, with occasional birches and limes standing in even ranks along the edge. Through the dry twigs, the skeleton branches bare of needles, through the scattered leaves the spacious fields could be seen stretching into the distance.

The path turned and I came out into the open country. Now the larks were right over my head and the air was hot and steamy.

People were moving everywhere.

Scythes were shearing through the grass with a sound like somebody blowing his nose.

I looked at the mowers enviously. If I set my mind to it, I could mow too, but I couldn't do it in front of everybody —I felt awkward. But it would be good to try.

I went to where the women were working. Rakes were lying beside a cart which had helplessly dropped its shafts onto the ground. I picked one of the shortest rakes and joined the line of women who glanced at me out of the corner of an eye, and made way for me.

At first it didn't go too well. I still had to get the knack of it. I flung out the rake and pulled it in. Perhaps I did it too slowly for part of the hay always slipped between the prongs.

"It's hard for you!" That was my neighbour's voice. Her face was dark with sunburn as an earthenware pot. A stately elderly woman.

"We can manage alone!" she said. "Rest in the shade. Why do you want to break your back!"

"Dmitri Petrovich!" called Anyuta. "Come over here!"

Anyuta was working with the girls—Marussya, Katya and Tatiana. They greeted me, exchanged swift glances and turned away. We worked.

"Oh, I've heard something, girls!" cried Marussya.

"What?" asked Katya without turning her head.

"Oh, listen girls," Tatiana interrupted hurriedly. "In Balki. . . ."

"What's happened in Balki?" asked Katya again.

"A calf's been blown up."

"How, blown up?"

"You haven't heard?" cried Tatiana, surprised, and rattled off: "A calf strayed from the herd in Balki. They went to look for it. They looked and looked but they couldn't find it. And then suddenly they found it—lying blown up in the bushes. By a German mine."

"The swine!" said Katya.

"When they were going they pushed mines in anywhere," Anyuta explained. "Be careful where you go, Dmitri Petrovich."

"Oh, girls!" cried Marussya again. "Do you know what?—Tonka's been to church!"

"Tonka went to church?"

"It was a scream!" giggled Marussya. "Her Ma was ill. And it was a festival—birth of the Virgin or something. And her Ma told Tonka to take her—she couldn't go alone. Tonka argued and argued but all the same she went. Her

Ma went into the church and Tonka after her. It was interesting all right!"

"I wouldn't have gone," said Katya indifferently.

"There was a choir singing in the church, all loud. And then suddenly Tonka heard a word. . ." Marussya giggled. "Oh, I can't. . . ."

"What word?" asked Tatiana.

"Oh, I can't, girls!" Marussya choked down her laughter. "I'll tell you afterwards," she glanced at me sideways.

"If you've started, finish it!" Katya insisted.

"What's got into you?" said Tatiana. "There were all these people in the church and they sang these words all the same?"

"Oh, I can't!" giggled Marussya. "Well, all right then."

She smothered her laughter, took a deep breath and rattled off in the deacon's quick patter:

"Far from a mother is virginity and strange to a maiden is procreation. . ." On the last word she choked. The girls laughed, red and embarrassed.

"That's Marussya all right!" said Katya. "Always gets hold of something."

"Tonka. . . Tonka, when she heard it, she covered her mouth with her hand. . . Oh, I can't!— and giggled into her fists. Everybody turned round. And her mother was whispering: you're disgracing me, you shameless hussy!"

Marussya had to stop working and doubled up over her rake, laughing.

I was raking as I listened. Now it was going better. I found it easier to rake with short, quick movements. I had to learn everything, like a child, and nobody could help me, nobody knew how it should be done. At first it had been difficult to wash myself; I think it was the hospital cat, Lizka, that really taught me that. But all the same the rake was heavy—for me, it needed to be half the length.

"He-e-eh!" came a distant call. What had happened?

"Girls! Dmitri Petrovich!" called Anyuta. "Dinner time!"

We threw down our rakes.

"Well, are you very tired?" asked Anyuta.

"No, what's there to tire me?" I asked. "It's rather pleasant. . . ."

That was true. After such work one feels stronger, lighter. I could never sit at a desk all the time!

We settled down under a nut tree to eat. I looked at Marussya. Her ear was like a large pink river shell, it looked fragile. A little hollow appeared and disappeared beside it as she ate.

"So it's not true that you captured Paulus?" said Marussya. "Eh, there's Granddad Larion for you!" and she laughed.

"Have you been away in other countries?" asked Katya.

I told the girls about Yugoslavia. The thing that they liked best was that walnuts grew there on trees—big trees, bigger than an oak.

"Maybe melons grow on trees there too?"

"Marussya!" That was Anyuta, afraid that I might be offended.

"And how do they hang, the walnuts?" asked Tatiana. "Like on a Christmas tree, or what?"

The girls laughed. I told them that the walnuts looked like unripe apples. A sort of green fruit. Then they blackened and split, and the nut was inside. But the green outer part was juicy, and the juice stained everything black, like shoe polish.

"Tell us some more," the girls begged.

"In Yugoslavia there was a partisan girl, Maida," I said. "She and some others were sent to a youth congress in a liberated town. But then they had to go back over the mountains. They wandered about the mountains for twenty days, there was no path, nothing but stones. All their boots were cut to pieces, they were limping, nearly crying. In the morning they could not get up. Only Maida laughed and sang songs. "It's all right, girls, stick it," she said, "we'll soon be there!" But when they lay down to sleep, she would cover her feet with her jacket. In the morning a girl got up and wanted to get something from Maida, a watch, I think it was, and she looked in her shoes, they were standing under an oak. But then she saw something queer—grass growing in the shoes. She picked one up and saw it had no sole. And Maida had been walking over the mountain stones, and even laughing! She pulled the jacket off Maida's feet and they were bleeding."

"Was she pretty, Maida?" asked Anyuta.

"I don't know. I never saw her, she died. But to me she's beautiful."

"That's right," said Anyuta, "of course, she's beautiful."

"There was a partisan commissar, here," Marussya began.

"Once the partisans seized Khoroshevo," Tatiana interrupted in her quick patter, "and they caught seven people serving in the German police. It was only just beginning to get light. They took them for trial at the People's Court, well, where the court had been before. They sentenced them to be shot. The commissar came out and read the sentence. 'But your names,' he said, 'I'm not going to pronounce. You're not worthy of Russian names.' "

"The Germans were keen as keen to get hold of him," said Marussya. "They promised no end of money to anybody as 'ud give him up. But nobody did. Once he was in the village alone. He'd only just gone when some Germans came. I suppose somebody must have told them after all. He saw them from beyond the village, and climbed up a tree. The Germans were going about everywhere, looking into the bushes, down by the river and in the ditches. And he sat there watching them. They looked for two hours. At last they went away. Then he came down from the tree, shook out his clothes, had a smoke and went off into the forest without hurrying."

"A grand lad!" I cried.

"He wasn't a lad at all, he was quite elderly," laughed Tatiana.

We talked of this and that, and I listened to the nut tree rustling behind me.

"How do, Uncle Dima," came Vassya's voice. "We've found a hedgehog. It's real bad-tempered. Want to see it?"

"Oh, hang it!" I said. "Let it go. Come and have a bathe, Vassya."

"Come on, girls!" called Marussya. "We'll go and bathe too."

We went off in different directions, the men—Vassya and I—one way, the girls in another. They ran down to the river laughing. We strolled down.

Yes, I'd have to learn to swim again too. The water seemed warm only in the evening—during the day it was chilly, one had to dip quickly to keep warm.

I ducked under the water with open eyes. How many tiny fish there were. They were not in the least timid, they even came and nudged my legs, tickling them. They were quite transparent. And my legs seen under the water seemed a pale greenish colour and unbelievably long. I jumped up, laughed, and beat the water with my arm. It gave elastically and bright drops scattered around.

Vassya was swimming overarm on the far side.

"Dmitri Petrovich! Swim over here, it's better here," called Marussya. Her voice came clearly, that meant that she had swum into the middle of the river.

"Marussya," said Anyuta reprovingly.

Yes, the water supported me. I could float on my back, I only needed to throw my head far back and move my legs a little. Then everything became quiet and I floated with the current looking at the green willow tops, the blue sky and the clouds.

Dusk was falling when we left the fields. The cows were being driven into the village. They were lowing as they came, starting on a low note like a steamer siren and ending with a burst of sound. Mingled with them was the stupid and persistent bleating of the sheep, sounding as though they were confessing their sins with tears in their voices.

Soon the lowing died away, replaced by the even sound of milk spurting into pails.

I thought the village would soon fall silent wrapped in weariness. But the girls had come out to stroll about. They walked through the dusky village, arms round each other, singing softly without words. And then suddenly they burst into full song—

"Today I set the window flowers
Away to the right. . . ."

and broke off on a high note. Again the vague humming like a woodcock's song. The lads standing at the gate were laughing: "You'd better sing a little louder, girls, or we can't hear you." But the girls wandered on, as though through a dark forest, mumbling. But then when the song came to the boil, again they suddenly burst out stridently, so you could hear it all over the place—from Strokino village all the way to Balki:

"So Lenin's and Stalin's pictures
Should have a better light!"

Away by Granddad Larion's cottage we still could hear the girls strolling in the village.

. . .

Granddad Larion was asleep, sitting on a log by a porch; the smouldering ashes

of the campfire lit up his face with a faint glow. It looked dark like a face on an icon, the beard white, beautiful. Potatoes were hissing and spluttering on a frying pan. He wakened as I approached.

"Started frying potatoes, for something to do," he said. "Let's have supper. Tired, Vassili? Eh? Never mind! When you grow up you'll be a man and a worker. I dozed off, didn't I? It's warm by the fire, makes you sleepy. The potatoes kept waking me up the way they spluttered and hissed! I thought it was that cat again. I kept saying: scat, scat, half asleep as I was. You'd have laughed."

"I'm not tired, Granddad," said Vassya. "Only my arms are aching a bit, and my legs seem to sort of hum—like a telegraph pole."

"Well, well!" laughed the old man affectionately. "Like telegraph poles, eh? And then you say you're not tired! Silly boy!"

We ate the potatoes right out of the pan.

"Uncle Dima worked with us too," said Vassya. The old man did not take it in at first.

"What's that?" he asked, bewildered.

"I'm saying, Uncle Dima raked hay," Vassya repeated. "All day. With Nyuta and Marussya, and Tanka. . . ."

"So that's it!" said the old man, surprised. "And I kept thinking where's he got to? Gone up in smoke! The rods in the porch, and took no food. Can he have gone looking for hares on an empty stomach, I was thinking. And that's where he was! That's what it's like when a man's used to working—couldn't stand doing nothing."

Then chagrin overcame the old man again.

"Eh, deary dear! There you are! And so that's the way of it, eh? All the folks on the field, even invalids, and only one left sitting by the fire—Granddad Larion! Eh, deary dear! If you'd only told me when you went. . . ."

"I didn't know myself," I began.

"I'd have come with you," Granddad continued excitedly. "Maybe I could have done a bit of something too—made porridge, whetted the scythes, or something. . . ."

"The cooks made porridge for everybody, Granddad," said Vassya.

"And d'ye think I can't cook, too?" Granddad argued. "See how I fried the potatoes. Aren't they all right?"

"They're dry!" I teased him.

"Not my fault," Granddad objected. "You should have come at sundown."

I went to bed. How pleasant to stretch out with your hand behind your head after you've been working! And slowly drift into sleep hearing the grasshoppers rasp outside the window, fall silent, and begin again louder than ever, and breathing the cool, moist air from the fields.

Granddad Larion was moving about on the other side of the partition, mumbling something about bees, about the chairman, and not wanting to loaf.

"Eh, deary dear," he cried. "In my old age!"

THE TRACTOR

At dawn there was a shower and at once the air was filled with scents. The birches sent out their fresh, damp breath, mingled with the dry smell of pine resin; on low ground the grass smelt faintly musty, and higher up it had the perfume of fresh hay. More flowers had come out during the night and golden buttercups spangled the shadows by the swamp. The birds seemed to be singing more loudly, or perhaps it was simply that their song carried further in the hot, perfumed air. Two cuckoos were calling at once—sometimes one would answer the other like a distant echo, sometimes they would merge in a single note, and sometimes they would interrupt each other so that instead of their clear call, it seemed as though they were clumsily mimicking the other birds.

Anyuta and I were sitting on the porch step, talking.

"It's awful! What'll we do now?" Anyuta was thoroughly upset.

"Nothing to be done," I said gloomily.

"We were counting on it so," said Anyuta, and there were tears in her voice. "We thought we'd get it right. . . You know what we had left after the Germans—just a pair of horses. We waited for the tractor, all the time we thought of it. . . And then that fool's got to go and fill himself with mushrooms!"

"He'll get right again."

"Yes, but when'll that be! The grain's getting ripe now; we began making a bridge. We wanted to drag the logs with

the tractor. . . And the worst of it is, there's no one else who understands the engine, only Grisha."

"Ask them to send someone from the machine and tractor station to help you."

"No good asking!" said Anyuta. "Their men are up to the eyes as it is. Our tractor's the one that was left after the war—Rumanian or something. The MTS didn't want to take it—what good's that scrap iron to us, they said! We thought we'd mend it ourselves. . . ."

"Well, he won't be in his bed for ever. He'll be up again."

"Yes, but when!"

I said nothing.

"The stupid fool!" said Anyuta in despair.

"Do you need the tractor very badly?" I asked glumly.

"I'm telling you—terribly!"

"Well, all right. Only I don't promise anything, Anyuta!"

Anyuta looked at me, perplexed.

"I'll try, but you need good hands for that. Will you help me?"

"But I. . . Of course, I will, and glad to!" cried Anyuta. "You mean you know how?"

"I don't know. I did, once."

"That's wonderful!"

Anyuta was glowing, looking at me worshipfully.

"Wait a minute!" I said, and went into my room. I hadn't so many things but I had to turn them all out. It's always like that when you're looking for something. Then I called:

"Come into the house, Anyuta!"

When she came I handed her my new trousers, the blue ones.

"Put those on."

"The idea!" cried Anyuta. "Me putting on men's trousers!"

I began to be angry.

"You know what it means, putting an engine right? Think you'll have time to be pulling down your skirt?"

"I don't care, I won't put them on!" said Anyuta obstinately. "The idea! All the folks'ud be laughing at me. . . ."

"Then it's no good," I said coldly, and turned away as though to go.

"Dmitri Petrovich!" said Anyuta in a muffled voice. "Give me them."

She wanted to put on the trousers over all her other clothes.

"You'll have to take off your skirt first!"

"Turn round, then!" cried Anyuta angrily. "Standing there staring!"

I went into the other room struggling not to laugh.

I heard Anyuta moving on the other side of the partition, and a moment later I heard her voice.

"Well, there you are!"

Anyuta was standing there in my new blue trousers, flushed, even her ears glowing, with a challenging, angry expression.

"Turn the ends up or you'll trip over them. That's the way. Well, come along then!"

I led the way out of the cottage.

Thunder was threatening but it passed by. Everything was very quiet. Sometimes a bird would chirp and another would reply but softly as though testing its voice. The trees and grass stood motionless. Now and then a branch would stir, and a damp breath would come from the left where thunder was rumbling and everything was veiled in a blue downpour of rain. A lorry passed along the road; and a smell of dust rose. Outside the barn where the tractor stood I met the chairman of the collective farm. He had pouting lips as though ready to kiss or whistle; a bristly beard and a little moustache grew around them.

"What's that you've got on?"

The chairman was looking at Anyuta in surprise.

"Where's that tractor of yours?" I interrupted.

"Over there, in the shed," the chairman replied eagerly. "Do you understand engines, then?"

"Like the palm of my hand. . . Anyuta'll help me."

The chairman led us into the shed.

"You'll be doing a grand thing for the collective farm."

He spoke with the greatest respect and rather shyly—probably afraid that I might change my mind.

An old, not very powerful tractor; simple construction. And after all, that fellow who ate too many mushrooms—Grigori or something—he'd already done nearly everything, only a few odds and ends left.

"It's dark here," I said. "We'll have to push it outside."

The chairman and Anyuta willingly set to work.

"Careful, Anyuta!" I said. "You'll tear my new trousers."

Anyuta bit her lip but said nothing.

We had no difficulty in finding the tools, they were on a shelf in the corner.

"I'll tell them to bring you some dinner here," said the chairman as he left.

Now I began a careful, unhurried examination of the engine; it would be fine if I could guess what was wrong without taking it down. I even began to whistle as I used to do.

"Oh," said Anyuta, stooping down, "isn't it interesting! It's just like when you clean a fish."

"What fish?"

"Any kind. With the guts there and the bladder. Only this is all iron."

I laughed and Anyuta reddened.

"I don't know what they're all for," she said. "If you'd only explain it a bit."

"Well, this is called the carburetter," I said, "and the air comes in from here. There, in that case, in pipes with water, the air's purified, and it goes through that tube to the engine. You understand?"

Anyuta said nothing.

"That's the nipple," I continued, "and that's the fuel pipe. There's the mixing chamber where the air's mixed with fuel gas. Here's the petrol feed pipe. Here's the drossel valve and there's the air valve and that's the lever for it. That's the throttle regulator. Now do you understand?"

"I'm too stupid," sighed Anyuta.

"Maybe the electrodes in the sparking plugs have burned out?" I asked myself thoughtfully. "Or the contact's bad?"

"How do I know?" sighed Anyuta.

We said nothing for some minutes.

"Well, nothing for it," I said. "We'll have to take her down. Find a key and get those nuts off."

My temper gradually began to suffer—it was foul to be helpless. And after all, Anyuta knew nothing at all.

"What's up with you?" I barked. "Haven't you ever unscrewed a nut, or what? Not that way! Not that way, the other, I tell you!"

I snatched the key from her. But I didn't make much of a job of it either. Twice the key slipped off. I lost my temper.

"Damn the tractor!" I snarled. "It's not an engine, but a primus stove, an alarm clock, a bicycle!"

Behind my back an injured Anyuta was whimpering and blowing her nose.

"Give me some waste, quick!" I cried. "What idiot's been putting oil into a tractor that's out of order!"

Anyuta ran off and came back with a cloth.

When I turned round a moment later I could hardly restrain my laughter; there were lines of dirt on Anyuta's face, tears on her eyelashes, and her lips were trembling. But her eyes were stubborn and angry.

"Hold this! Tighter! What's wrong with you, can't hold onto anything, or what?"

We spent four hours wrestling with the engine. Previously I could have done the job in half an hour.

In the middle of the day Granddad Larion came in.

"Here's good day to ye!" he cried gaily. "Eh, it's a real repair workshop you've got here!"

"Eh, Granddad!" I barked. "Better not come near me. You've picked a moment when you may get a spanner at you. Just accidentally like!"

"Eh, eh, like that, is it!" rumbled Granddad. "I'll get away, lad."

From a distance I heard Granddad shouting to somebody:

"He's a tough one! When he's working you can see at once he's an officer. Barked at me so I was blown out!"

Now he'd be telling everybody that I'd been a divisional commander. Oh, Granddad, Granddad!

Anyuta giggled, I glanced at her and burst out laughing too—how on earth could anybody get so dirty? And she'd torn my trousers after all. Probably on a nail, just ripped them. And her skin was showing through the tear.

When she laughed her cheeks grew round like two little apples and there was a sly little twinkle in her eyes as though she knew she had been naughty herself, or—that you had been.

"Well, that's that," I said. "The differential's in order. The connections checked. Looks as though that's all... Let's fill the tank—where's the petrol?"

We were a long time starting the tractor. I swung the handle with all my strength, sweat streaming down my face.

"Let me do it!" Anyuta begged. "Let me try!"

"Get out!"

The engine began to throb but at once died again. The sound brought the collective farmers.

"Look how black they are, you could scare crows with them!" gasped the women. "And Anyuta, look at Anyuta, in trousers!"

Anyuta did not even seem to see them. She was pale with excitement.

I had already raised blisters with that confounded starting handle.

"Let me," Anyuta implored.

"Here, give it to me," said the chairman and seized the starting handle.

The beating soon grew into a roar; the engine was working. The old tractor trembled.

Anyuta was beaming. Smudged, smelling of petrol, weary, she stood there as proud as though she herself had invented the tractor.

I heard a whisper from Tatiana: "Oh, Anyuta! You mended the tractor together? Oh, aren't you lucky!"

"Come and rest," the chairman invited me. We sat down on a beam and he got out his tobacco pouch.

"Here, let me roll you a cigarette."

We lighted up.

"Very many thanks from the collective farm!" said the chairman. "We'll enter you and Anyuta for three workdays. It's not too little?"

After a moment's silence he asked cautiously:

"But maybe you'd like to stop here with us? We'll build you a new cottage. Vityugov can make the furniture. Live here!"

From the tail of my eye I could see Anyuta. She was rooted to the spot, her hands clasped against her breast, listening. "I'll think it over," I said.

Now I could go over to Anyuta.

"You'll have to see me home—your things are left at Larion's place."

As we left the village, I said:

"You'll excuse me, Anyuta—you understand. . . ."

"Oh, why, Dmitri Petrovich!" cried Anyuta, looking at me in shy admiration. "It's me that's clumsy!"

"Everything's difficult when you're not used to it. So you're not angry?"

"Why, how could I be!"

The clouds were rolling away from the fields. A few remained drifting in broken strips with ragged fragments hanging from them. But they were retreating, menacing, heated, rumbling dully and sometimes sending down a spatter of rain. Below, the evening sun bathed the fields and the wall of pines by the fence. Everything was moist, brilliant and gay.

Anyuta changed her clothes in Granddad Larion's cottage. When she saw what my new trousers looked like she nearly wept with remorse.

"Oh, look what I've done!" she gulped softly. "You can be angry or not, just as you like, but I'm taking them home to wash."

"That's an idea!" I said sternly. "Washing a man's trousers. They'll laugh at you."

"Let them!" said Anyuta stubbornly.

"Eh, my tobacco's finished!" I said suddenly. "I'll have to go back to the village. I'll see you as far as the shop."

We left together, Anyuta carrying my trousers rolled up in a bundle.

"Are you going to stay fishing for long?"

"I don't know. Till I get tired of it. Maybe a month, maybe longer."

"But at home they must be waiting and pining for you," Anyuta sighed.

"They're not waiting."

"How can that be?"

"There's nobody to wait, Anyuta."

"Oh," said Anyuta softly. "Forgive me—it was stupid of me."

We walked in silence for some time.

"All the same," said Anyuta sadly, "you'll stop for a time and then you'll go. It's dull for you in the country."

"They need good workers on the collective farm—not fellows like me."

"Oh, aren't you ashamed to say it?" said Anyuta, flushing with anger.

"Shall I ask to keep bees, instead of Granddad Larion?" I said.

"And what about the reading room? Or the laboratory? Or the club? Or the Village Soviet? Why are you so silly?"

A young spruce torn up by a storm lay beside the path. The naked trunk with its green bruises was still partly covered with dry shiny tatters of bark. And like reddish hair thrown back drifted the dead needles of the broken branches.

"Your sweetheart didn't come back?" I asked.

"What sweetheart?" Anyuta turned big eyes upon me; they were grey,

fringed with golden lashes. "I haven't any sweetheart."

"That's not true! Granddad Larion told me," I invented.

"Oh, if it was Granddad Larion!" laughed Anyuta. "You'd better tell me how you captured Paulus?"

"I didn't take Paulus, but I'm grateful to Granddad Larion all the same."

"What for?"

"If it hadn't been for him, you'd never have noticed me."

"Oh, how dense you are," said Anyuta. "I noticed you the first time you came, in your army greatcoat."

"Anyuta!"

"Oh!" Anyuta started. "We've got a meeting right now. . . ."

She ran off quickly. On a rise she turned and called:

"Come to the mill tomorrow! Will you?"

I wandered about in the forest till late.

At night it was warmer in the forest—the heat of the day still hovered under the leaves and the spruce branches. Thick white mist curled over the pond as though boiling water had been poured into it. A scent of wet rye flour came from the motionless grain fields. Along the horizon lay a green band, sunset or sunrise, it was hard to tell which, and a cool breath came from that direction.

Then a faint glow appeared. I looked at it in disquiet—where was the fire? In Ustinovka? In Alexeyevka? Or perhaps in the woods? The glow brightened, then faded, and through the slender tops of the larches a harvest moon floated.

WE MAKE UP NICKNAMES

All these days the thunderstorm hovered about. On Monday the rumblings like gunfire, could be heard from Petrov-sky, we could even see the lightning flashes, and in the evening the last of the clouds floated over the village. They came in dark, ragged strips, rumbling dully and shaking down occasional drops. The night was disturbed, with flickering lightning.

Two days ago there had been a thunderstorm in Kablukov. The edge of the cloud passed over the village, and again a few drops spattered into the dust. In the evening the storm could be seen from the hill hovering near, dark veils of rain swept over Ustinovka, Alexeyevka and the forest.

But the previous day the collective farmers had been startled by the point-blank firing of thunder, and before they had time to get in their washing and run back into the houses, down came the rain, in rapid slanting continuous streams, as though out of a watering can. Then it began to hail. The first stones were like pigeon's eggs, and clattered down like pebbles hurled in anger. Leaves and twigs showered from the trees.

After the rain a girl came out with a jar to collect the hailstones which were big as cherries. "What do you want those for?" I asked. "It's good to suck for the toothache," she told me, "it freezes it!"

Three times the rain returned but there was no more hail.

Along the whole left side of the village, windows were broken and twigs snapped off by the hail were lying on the ground. Beneath the trees the earth was covered with branches, twigs and leaves.

Anyuta said that the grain had suffered very little—the hail had passed over a narrow strip.

Vassya and I went to the elm and stopped.

"It doesn't look like the same place," I said doubtfully.

"Yes, it's the same," Vassya assured me.

"But the water was clear there, and here, see, there's grass growing in the river. And the elm's not so thick."

"The hail cut it," said Vassya, "and the grass has grown. It's ages since we've been here."

The reddish blades of grass had grown thick on the left bank of the river; fallen leaves had caught in them, and the water was stagnant and rusty-looking. Previously there had been only the flattened grass to show the path on the farther side but now it was plainly visible like a narrow straw mat.

We sat down beneath the elm. The air was filled with the scent of rotting leaves and mushrooms. The grass was cool, shining with dew. Today the fish were jumping energetically all the time.

Vassya was morose. I felt guilty. I had neglected the boy recently.

He watched the float, wrinkled his nose and every now and then gave the line a sharp tug. The float came to the shore leaving two small waves.

"Vassya!" I said.

"What?"

He did not even turn his head.

"Look at that jackdaw walking on the other bank! It looks as though it had put on a tight frock and was afraid of splitting it—turns its head to one side or the other with every step. Isn't it funny!"

Vassya said nothing.

"You know what, Vassya? Let's find nicknames for people."

"Why?"

"Just for fun! In our platoon we gave each other some queer nicknames. One of us had been a blacksmith but he was so small and measly we couldn't imagine him banging very hard on the anvil; so we just called him the Woodpecker."

The beginning of a smile dawned on Vassya's face.

"I've got my nickname already—the Walking Scarecrow."

"Don't fool!"

"What do they call that dog in the village, the ginger one?"

"The Ozornovs'? Snap!"

"That's it . . . well, when Snap saw me the first time he howled, turned over and began to roll about. I thought he was splitting his sides with laughing!"

"Don't fool! I suppose a flea had bitten him, that's why he rolled about."

"I frighten crows and sparrows and even chickens, and little children scream and run home. Of course, boys of ten aren't afraid, but when they're with me they get bad-tempered and say nothing, and pretend not to see anything but the float."

"Don't fool!" laughed Vassya.

"So you see, I'm the Walking Scarecrow. Now let's find a name for Granddad Larion."

"He likes to talk a lot," said Vassya uncertainly.

"Talk—that's one thing. He likes to make things up. Let's call him King Brag of Mendacity."

Vassya sighed.

"Only not 'king'," he said, "Granddad'll be offended. Something different—chairman, or something."

"Approved! Now it's your turn."

"The boys gave me a name, but it's a silly one."

"What did they call you?"

"'The Author.' Vanka and I used to write things in those days. . . And so that's what they called me."

"We'll find something else."

I looked at him. The boy was waiting, he already had his mouth open, ready to laugh.

"Aha! We'll make you the master of all the fish in the River Sestra and its tributaries. You'll be 'Vassili Fish Combine'? Right?"

The boy laughed.

"I do love fishing with you, Uncle Dima!" he said confidingly. "Let's make it always like this."

"Let's."

A fish jumped nearby; for an instant its dark back showed above the water.

"That's a big one!" whispered Vassya.

The widening circles spread far over the quiet river; the floats swayed gently.

"Now we must think of some more nicknames."

"Whose?"

"Anyuta."

"Oh, bother her."

"Can't leave her out, Vassya. Everybody's got one, she must have one too."

"All right," said Vassya. "I've thought of one—Nyutka-Utka." [1]

"No good. She's not a bit like a duck."

"But it rhymes. Well, then Nyutka-Dudka." [2]

"Drop it!" I said decidedly. "She's got pretty hair, like spun gold. You've noticed it? And she's clever. Let's call her Golden Cupola."

"That's silly," the boy protested. "What is she, a church, or what?"

"You're right. No good."

I pondered.

A tiny green fish with big eyes was swimming near the bank floating down sideways with the stream. Suddenly a convulsive movement brought its head against the current and it shot up stream. Again it stopped and floated down. A dark shadow on the sand reflected its movements; the shadow was plainer—first you saw the shadow, then the fish.

"You know what?" I said slowly. "Anyuta's always busy about everything—the tractor, the mill, the spruce. . . Let's call her. . . Let's call her Hct-and-Bothered. Eh?"

"All right," Vassya agreed meekly.

It was one of those coincidences which

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[1] Utka—duck.

[2] Dudka—a whistle.

do sometimes happen: the moment we stopped talking we heard a song in the distance. A deep rich woman's voice was singing

"Do not flutter, little doves,
Do not flutter all together. . . ."

"She's coming," said Vassya grimly.

"Quiet!" I whispered. "Don't say anything. Let her look for us."

"All the same she'll see the floats!" Vassya said in a terrified whisper.

In a moment or two the bushes parted and Anyuta jumped down to join us. She was glowing with colour—in a pink blouse, with golden hair fluttering, her face sunburned, smiling.

"I've brought you some lunch!" said Anyuta. "Eat something while your dinner's still swimming."

I watched her deft movements as she unfastened the bundle and took out some nicely-browned cream cheese pies.

"I made them myself," she said proudly. "Have some."

Anyuta held out a second pie to Vassya. But he shook his head and moved away.

"I don't want it!"

"Just try it! It's sweet!" Anyuta urged.

Vassya turned his back, leaving me a view of a washed-out blue shirt and a sunburned neck.

"Oh, they are lovely!" I teased him.

Vassya dropped his rod and jumped up. Anyuta was just in time to catch his arm.

"Where are you going! Vassenka!"

His back turned, without looking round, the boy tried to jerk himself free.

"What's this, Vassya!" I said sternly. "Trying to fight Anyuta, or what?"

The boy stopped struggling. He sat down on the grass, covered his face with his hands and burst into tears.

"Wh-why did she come here, U-uncle Dimochka!" he said reproachfully.

I was at a loss, I did not know what to do.

"Why, Vassya, Vassya!" I mumbled. "What's this—Vassili Fish Combine crying? You're the one that's proud and determined, Vassya!"

Anyuta drew the boy to her.

"Now, now, that'll do, that's enough, Vassya!" she said softly. "Don't. Let's both love him together. We'll help each other. Yes?"

I dropped the curd cake and jumped up, embracing both of them with my arm.

"Vasska, you little imp!" I cried, and stooping down to the boy's red, scratched ear, I whispered: "Vasska, would you like to be my son?"

The lad had stopped crying but he did not raise his head; he sat there huddled against Anyuta's shoulder.

"He wants to. Of course he wants to!" said Anyuta gaily.

The boy raised his head. Tears still hung on his lashes but his eyes were shining; he smiled shyly, happily.

Something rustled behind us and we turned. The striped cat was sniffing the grass. The curd cake was gone. Seeing himself discovered the cat flattened his ears, arched his back and purred flatteringly, his yellow eye glancing aside at the nearest bushes—just in case.

Oh, Fomka, Fomka!

"He's come to visit us!" laughed Vassya.

"How do you do, Mr. Foma!" said Anyuta with great solemnity. "Do my curd cakes suit your taste, Mr. Foma? I baked them myself. . . ."

We screwed up our eyes in the bright sunshine and laughed.

Translated by Eve Manning

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THE HERO IN SOVIET DRAMA

The social changes wrought in the life of Russia by the October Revolution also transformed the course of Russian letters. Pre-revolutionary writers, in their overwhelming majority, lived within the narrow circle of upper and middle-class interests, drawing their impressions and knowledge of life from these circles. Even those who held progressive and democratic views—at all times professed by the best of the Russian men of letters—derived their types and their ideas from the experiences of well-to-do society. Hence, in pre-revolutionary fiction, the village and the peasantry, for example, served merely as an ethnographic background which, however, in the works of the truly great writers was now and then illumined by amazing flashes of insight into the essential nature of village life and peasant psychology. The life, toil and interests of the country's labouring masses remained outside the sphere of literary endeavour, with the exception of the works of Maxim Gorky, founder of Socialist realism in literature.

Therefore, a double process was necessary: on the one hand, the writers of the old generation, now participating in the building of the new social order, had to enter into the new way of life and study the psychology of the workers and peasants, the masters of the country's fate and the makers of its new history; on the other hand, the new masses had to produce and mould writers from their own midst. Before this process could be consummated and its fruits reaped, a matter of several years, the tendency to reflect the new revolutionary era was already making itself felt in contemporary literature and particularly in drama. It found expression in the romantic colouring of historical heroes, in symbolic and allegoric writing and in a poster-like portrayal of conflicting social forces. The real history of the hero of Soviet drama, however, begins with the appearance of the first realistic plays based on post-revolutionary days and themes.

During the thirty years that have elapsed since the inception of the Soviet system, many thousands of plays on contemporary subjects have been written in the more than 150 languages of the various nationalities of the Soviet Union. Today they make up the lengthy history of Soviet dramaturgy. It is impossible to analyze that history in isolation from the concrete conditions of life of each of the Soviet peoples and from the influence of the general course of literature on the drama; on the other hand, it must be studied together with the fierce struggle which raged around the various artistic trends within the Soviet theatre itself.

Such an all-around historical analysis would certainly demand far more space than a magazine article permits. The present article, therefore, is designed to show briefly how at different stages in the country's growth the hero of Soviet drama embodies the ideals of his time, what changes his character, his moral code and intellectual development undergo and what new vistas open up before him.

In tracing the development of Soviet drama, we must begin with the hero whose character was shaped under the conditions of the old world, but who breaks with that world and with the capitalist code of morality, then come the birth and making of the new Soviet type of hero, the builder of the new Socialist world, followed by the revelation of the moral and social qualities of the new man, the Man who is to serve as a model for the generations to come.

In tackling problems of such scope and social significance, the Soviet drama has always performed an important educational function.

Soviet drama, and indeed Soviet literature as a whole, has never shrunk from ruthless, scathing criticism of life's imperfections.

In the main, however, we find attention focussed on the educational value of the good, on the creation of the beautiful, on the recognition of the positive elements in modern reality that are growing and developing as human ideals find concrete expression.

The folklore of the peoples of the Soviet Union abounds in stories about great men who rose up against the old world, the champions of Socialist ideals. By far the greater number of the legends and stories are woven around Lenin, the founder of the Socialist state.

Soviet drama also turned to Lenin as a new type of hero. Playwrights saw in him the incarnation of man's noblest moral qualities, free from the infirmities of the old world and expressive of all that is stimulating, creative and harmonious in the human character.

Lenin appears in a large number of plays by Russian dramatists, as well as by playwrights of other nationalities, the fullness and artistic merits of the portrait varying considerably. Pogodin in his plays *The Man With the Gun* and *Kremlin Chimes* is, perhaps, to be credited with the greatest success in this respect.

The capture of state power by the workers and peasants, Lenin and Stalin preparing the Revolution, and the events of the Revolution itself furnish both the historic background and subject matter for the *Man With the Gun*. In *Kremlin Chimes*, the action is laid in the first years of the existence of the Soviet system, and the play deals with the tangled

psychological attitudes of the Russian intelligentsia after the crash of the old régime.

Shadrin, the peasant-soldier, who comes to the capital to seek truth, the truth as the peasants see it, is the chief character of *The Man With the Gun*. In *Kremlin Chimes* tho central figure is engineer Zabelin, an expert in his line and a highly cultured man of great intellectual powers, who, at first, is at a loss how to adjust himself to the new order of society and is far from understanding the aspirations of the people. Their talks with Lenin prove equally decisive for both Shadrin and Zabelin.

The influence Lenin exerts on both these men, so unlike each other, so different in their understanding of life's aims and ideals, is, on the whole, the same. It is the deep concern for their future with which Lenin approaches each of the two men that wins them over completely. Immediately sizing up the intellectual calibre of the man in front of him, Lenin by means of a few pointed, seemingly neutral phrases leads him to reveal that which weighs most heavily on his mind; Pogodin's plays show how Lenin compels his interlocutor to see his own private problem in a broad social light, in the light of social progress.

With every fibre of his being Lenin gives himself up to the public welfare. In the travail of the present he envisages the road to a better future. Lenin's genius in directing the efforts of every honest person towards the building of a better world and rallying all of the individual's gifts for that purpose, is the principal feature in Pogodin's portrait. Pogodin endows Lenin's image with all of the ideal qualities of the human character—all that has come to stand for human nobility and goodness. All the human virtues—simplicity, amiability, modesty, magnanimity, honesty, love of freedom, courage, loyalty, singleness of purpose—go to make up the portrait of Lenin. They govern his daily activity as well as guide him in his titanic task of changing human society. These simple human virtues thereby acquire a new creative value which not only gives rise to a new moral code in the individual but impels the will towards the building of a new life, a life based on these moral principles. Thus in the character of Lenin Soviet drama embodied the people's ideal of the perfect man.

We find Soviet dramatists seeking the same sterling qualities in men of lesser calibre, in scientists who fight to conquer nature in some narrow field. Two of the finest Soviet plays devoted to the lives of great men of science were Leonid Rachmanov's *Restless Old Age*, a portrait of Kliment Timiryazev, the eminent Russian naturalist, and Alexander Dovzhenko's *Life in Bloom*, based on the biography of Michurin, widely famed for his contribution to the science of fruit-growing.

These two plays are different in the ground they cover, in time and in style. *Restless Old Age* is devoted to the last years of Timiryazev's life. The action of the play is laid in Petrograd in the years 1918 and 1919. Its main conflict revolves around a struggle for the loyalties of the scientist between the university faculty, accustomed to a smug, quiet existence, and representatives of the insurgent people who had taken power into their hands and were now storming the heights of science and culture. Timiryazev (in the play he is called Polezhayev) is a scholar whose life had been devoted to purely scientific problems and who seemed likely to be averse to political upheaval, a man extremely jealous of his time, having little to do with those who had no interest in science. And yet, he makes his choice without hesitation. Like every really great man of science, his sympathies lie with the people who set out to create a better world, for were not his own life, his dreams and experiments, directed towards the same goal?

This play, based on Timiryazev's life, is a psychological monodrama in which the inner world of the chief character is gradually unfolded. It is by carefully and faithfully piecing together small details of every-day life, psychological finesses and circumstantial evidence, shown through events and people that the playwright builds up a profound, well-rounded portrait of a great scientist and reveals his mental outlook.

Life in Bloom is quite a different play. In it Alexander Dovzhenko covers a period of forty years in his hero's life and work. The opening scenes of the play are set in the nineties of the last century, when Michurin's experiments begin to gain world-wide recognition: the play ends on the eve of Michurin's death in the thirties. It is an epic of man's struggle with nature against the background of two entirely different epochs. In tsarist Russia Michurin was compelled to go out of his way to prove that he had a right to change nature so that man may benefit from the new varieties of fruit he cultivated, fruit that could be grown in the North where hitherto fruit-growing was regarded as impossible. With the advent of the Soviets Michurin's work received the recognition it deserved from the leaders of the Soviet government and the Soviet people, and his theories became widely popular.

Michurin emerges from the play as an ardent dreamer, a scientist fired by the zeal of his great aim in life, and combining that zeal with a sober, rigid and cold analysis of each of his experiments. The play is based on this combination of passionate devotion to an ideal and analytical soberness that are outstanding in the scientist's character.

A breach with the past and a renunciation of the old world, the realization that capitalist society is historically doomed, the personal catastrophe of failure to adjust oneself through affiliation to the old world, the bareness of existence in a selfish society based on private property—these were themes used by a number of playwrights.

The various problems which these themes presented arose from life itself. With the crash of the old system of social relations, based on the exploitation of man by man, on the principle of every man for himself, the ordinary man's attitude to society and his environment changed. An uprooting of this kind could not of course proceed smoothly. It, naturally, depended on a change of psychology, of long-established customs and habits, as well as on a revolution of ideals.

All this led to great individual crises. The more outstanding the ability and character of man, the more important the positions they hold under the old régime, the more deeply rooted their world outlook in the old order of things, the more acute the crises through which they had to pass.

The dramas Gorky wrote after the Revolution centre around the man who revises his attitude to the old world and its moral code of which he had formerly been part and parcel. In his play *The Old Man*, the action is laid in pre-revolutionary Russia. Mastakov, the hero of the play, is a man of action, a creator who endeavours to lead a sensible and active life under prevailing conditions. He fails, however, because all his efforts clash with the false and sterile morality of the times. In the two dramas that followed—*Egor Bulychev and Others* and *Dostigayev and Others*—Gorky draws powerful portraits of a man at odds with the old world. This is particularly true of his portrayal of the crisis in Egor Bulychev's mind.

Egor Bulychev and Others opens on the eve of the October Revolution. The old world seems to be existing as ever before with no external evidence of its impending collapse. Yet the feeling of instability and imminent catastrophe is present everywhere. The play centers around a wealthy merchant, a man who will stop at nothing to make profit, a man of a sanguine, active nature with complete faith in his own methods and principles. A disease which proves fatal overtakes him, both he and the people around him know that he is going to die, although they do not know how long the dying will take.

In this situation the energetic man of action seeks moral support only to find that the people around him are engrossed in their own selfish interests. These people do not behave any differently from what he would normally have expected, still, under the circumstances, Bulychev's faith in the moral code which they represent is inevitably shaken.

The handful of men and women who devote themselves to progressive and democratic ideals are naturally hostile to Bulychev and his world. This makes Bulychev more than ever aware of the meaninglessness and sterility of all he had lived for and of the isolation for which he cannot find any remedy when he faces death. There is not even the solace that his lifetime's work would be carried on, and he gets to the stage when he is no longer feeling that it should be continued after his death.

A rankling and aimless animus arises in Bulychev, he condemns all that he had previously held dear and all the people around him. He has not enough physical life left to him to hope that he will acquire new faith.

The man who loses his grasp of the old, who renounces his lifetime's work, his ideals and values, his loyalties and obligations without accepting any new ideals, aims in life and values—this became the main tragic theme in Soviet dramaturgy of the time. The people portrayed belonged to the upper strata of society. They were men of different intellectual scope and temperament uprooted by the forces at play in the new Soviet way of life. This theme finds consummate expression in the plays of Leonid Leonov, Boris Romashov, Alexei Faiko, Nikolai Virta, and many others. From Leonov's plays *Untilovsk*, *Wolf*, *Blizzard*, Romashev's *Layer-Cake*, *The End of Krivorylsk*, Faiko's *Man With Portfolio*, *Evgraf, the Adventure-Seeker*, Virta's *Land* emerge the portraits of a landowner, an officer, a manufacturer, a merchant, an official, an engineer, a wealthy sibarite who imagined himself a philosopher, a *kulak*, each of which in his own particular sphere presents a variant of that tragic theme.

The playwrights did not leave any road open for the reconciliation of their characters with Soviet reality. They were people whose lives were so deeply rooted in the capitalist system, and egoism and egocentrism, profit-making, concern for their own personal welfare were so fundamental in their make-up; so organic with them, that they could not conceive life otherwise. They were so inextricably bound up with the old order that its very existence was a matter of life and death to them. Thus, the destiny of the hero of the old world found its expression in the Soviet drama of the twenties and thirties.

The two first important dramas to portray in a strong, realistic fashion the new Soviet life and to show up its positive forces were Vladimir Bill-Belotserkovsky's *Storm* and Constantine Trenev's *Lyubov Yarovaya*. Apart from their being great stage successes, these plays won for themselves a lasting place in the history of Soviet drama. *Storm* and *Lyubov Yarovaya* deal with the defence the young Soviet state put up against the intervention and the reactionary forces that sought to stifle it. The story of *Storm* centres around the heroic life of the people of a small town which fights gallantly against the enemy in the face of famine and economic chaos. This play abounds in sketches from the every-day life of the townspeople.

Lyubov Yarovaya brings to the stage the split which the Revolution causes in the ranks of Russian intellectuals some of whom identify themselves with the progressive elements and some with the reactionary forces. Lyubov Yarovaya, a schoolmistress, sides with the people while her unprincipled, callous and selfish husband, Lieutenant Yarovoy, serves the cause of reaction. Their belonging to opposite political camps kills the couple's affections for each other and they become enemies.

Storm is more in the nature of a dramatic chronicle, while *Lyubov Yarovaya* is a psychological drama. The two plays were written in different parts of the country, but they appeared at the same time and present a number of personages who in character, biography and attitude resemble each other closely.

This is particularly true of the sailor-revolutionaries, Bratishka and Shvandia. They are young men of the people, rough diamonds, resolute, recklessly courageous, scrupulously honest, with hearts of gold and ready to the last drop of their blood to defend the ideals of liberty, equality and justice, although they still have but a vague idea of their meaning. Both are of an impulsive,

vehement nature, obeying only the bidding of their own hearts.

This particular type in Soviet drama was painted with a good deal of stress on detail, with the peculiar jargon of sailor dialogue and the specific sailor ways. In Soviet drama they were presented as the knights of the Revolution, symbolizing the spontaneous power and talent of the people.

It is interesting to note that some years later—in the thirties—when the culture of the country and the intellectual life of the people were immeasurably higher, the attitude of the playwrights to this sailor character, with the romance of the sea upon him, underwent a great change. In Vishnevsky's play *The Final and Decisive* two characters, frankly drawn in the Bratishka-Shvandia tradition, ten years later become negative types in the changed conditions and are duly discredited. Still later, in the *Optimistic Tragedy* by the same playwright, this impulsive, undisciplined character underwent further change. This time, owing to his ideological instability, his egocentrism leads him into the enemy's camp. In this play the author creates the antithesis of the undisciplined character—a new type of hero whose development we shall trace later in the plays *Platon Krechet* and *The Lad From Our Town*.

By the end of the twenties Russian economy, shattered during the years of World War I and the Civil War, had been rehabilitated and the foundations of the Soviet state had been built. The country had grown strong and was now ready to embark on the grand economic plans which would transform it completely. The reconstruction of industry and agriculture, cardinal changes in the productive forces, the transformation of the country from an agrarian to an industrial land were made possible by the great cultural development of the people at large, by the training of experts from among the democratic strata of society. Momentous, far-reaching changes were wrought in the intellectual level of the ordinary Soviet man who, under the new order, had every opportunity to develop his native gifts and make the most of them by leading a creative and constructive life.

The new type of ordinary Soviet person that appeared was a builder, a master of his own fate who saw the consummation of his life's aims in constructive effort. He was the new man who undertook the titanic task of transforming one-sixth of the world in an unbelievably short time. He it was who became the central character of Soviet drama in the thirties.

Soviet life developed at an impetuous pace and brought many transformations. The first, even slipshod attempts, to portray the phenomena of the new life of the thirties were not only stimulating but instructive.

And Soviet drama needed new forces to solve the problems then confronting it. Stage successes were now written more often by people from different walks of life, possessing a fund of experience which permitted them to reproduce life in all its richness and colour. These new dramatists experienced in the ways of life at first wrote, what may be regarded as dramatic chronicles, news features for the stage, their subjects drawn directly from life, and hardly fictionalized at all.

Outstanding among the dramatists who now came to the fore was Nikolai Pogodin, formerly a feuilleton writer and a newspaper correspondent. He brought to the Soviet drama the new hero of that phase in the development of the life of the Socialist land, when Stalin's first five-year plans were taking effect.

Although the new character appearing in the drama of the thirties expressed the best qualities of the time, he was not consistently perfect. The great difficulties with which, particularly at the beginning of their great venture, the builders of the five-year plans had to contend, could not but affect the cast of their moral character. To build new cities in the mountains and deserts, to blaze the trail in new branches of industry, to reclaim the vast lands and natural resources of the East and North—all this was in itself a grand and exciting undertaking. It was natural that at this particular period the man who could make a concrete showing of his success should earn the highest admiration. The chief character of the plays of this period is a builder of the new industries who is not by any means a paragon of all the virtues. He appears in the whole complicated tangle of the private and social relations of his time, the prejudices, inherited from the old world, mingled with the new qualities of the future man. This was the first sketch of the builder of the Soviet world, a man of great enterprise in whom along with the new, revolutionary and constructive qualities of character, some of the features of the distorted morality of the capitalist world still exist.

Such was Guy, an important executive, the chief character in Pogodin's play *My Friend*. Guy is a practical thinker with a wide grasp of things and a keen, flexible mind. There are times when to attain his goal he will not stop before minor digression from his principles, minor violations of government and social ethics. Light-heartedly Guy proceeds to achieve his ends by putting faith in the ancient saying that victors are above censure.

In the latter part of the thirties the Soviet public began to feel an urgency for a definition of Soviet morality and the course along which it must now develop.

In upbringing and education, the youth who came of age in the pre-war years was a youth with his ideology deeply rooted in the Soviet way of thinking and living. There now arose the question—what did the youth learn from the preceding generation, who had created the social order that opened such wide prospects before him? To show the continuity of the revolutionary tradition, which Soviet youth inherited from their fathers, was the drama's way of replying to this question. It was only natural that some plays should show an inclination to romanticize that tradition—the life and work of the founders of the Soviet state. A typical play of this period is Mikhail Svetlov's *Twenty Years Later*, in which verse alternates with prose, to depict the central theme of the

supplanting of one generation by another. The main characters are young boys and girls who plunged into the fighting of the Civil War of 1918-1920, where they gained their first experience and set out on an independent path in life. Theirs was a noble and unselfish youth filled with the ardour of battle. Twenty years later we find the new gernera-tion, guided by the same noble ideals taking their first independent steps with the country bonding every effort to carry out the five-year plans, to build the new Socialist society. What is stressed in the play is that the twenty years which separate the two generations are not just ordinary years, but twenty years of an impetuous march forward, twenty years of revolutionary change which transformed the entire country.

The young people of the thirties took their places in life fully equipped and with a clear idea of what they wanted. Unlike the young people of the early twenties, who sought fervently for an opportunity to try out their feeble and scant forces, plunging with a reck-lessness and a naive sort of self-sacrifice into the struggle, the youth which matured under the Soviet system possessed the high pro-fessional knowledge required to achieve the fulfillment of its great ideals.

In Alexander Korneichuk's *Platon Krechet* and in Constantine Simonov's *The Lad From Our Town* the new hero, the expert, the professional of high intellectual powers is most vividly portrayed.

The chief character of these plays represents, to a great degree, the ordinary type of pre-war Soviet man. Platon Krechet is a talented surgeon, an eminent representative of his profession, a man of great will power, coura-geous in his public and professional activi-ties. He is shown combating ignorance and conceit in his professional sphere, asserting his own ideas and seizing every opportunity to bring advancement to his profession. Sergei Lukonin, hero of *The Lad From Our Town*, is a willful youngster, a city tough, who becomes an army officer, winning his battles not by dint of fearlessness and courage alone, but mainly by exercising and developing his mental powers and his grasp of his pro-fession. Lukonin knows that he is fighting for a great ideal—to create a better, harmoni-ous society in which there would be no place for wars.

It was natural that during recent years all forms of art should draw their themes from the events of the war—the invasion of the Hitlerites, the death and destruction it brought to whole countries and to culture, the mortal danger which hung over the Soviet Union and all liberty-loving peoples. The unprecedented scale on which hostili-ties developed, the incredible efforts which the Soviet land exerted, first, to withstand the blow of the fascists and then to grind them to dust, stimulated the playwright's imagina-tion. Plays of this period paid tribute to the mass heroism of the Soviet people, to their high moral qualities which were evident before the war, which had been fostered by the Soviet way of life, but had not had such an opportunity for expression as the war offered.

During the war thousands of plays were written in the various languages of the peoples of the Soviet Union. These were dedicated to the Soviet man in war conditions, to his moral strength, his patriotism, heroic deeds. "War conditions" meant life on the home front as well as on the battlefront, in a word, it meant all that related to the war effort of the Soviet people. The heroes of the first Soviet war plays were, in many cases, characters already familiar to Soviet drama. Among them, for example, were people who had painfully broken with the old world. This time, however, their breach with the old world did not mean the wrecking of their lives, did not lead to a desolate moral death, but made them identify themselves with the people, helped them discover their true aim in life—finding their redemption in patriotic deeds. The other chief wartime character was a person who had no roots in the old bourgeois order at all, but belonged heart and mind to the new Socialist world. And for him to fight and give his life for the preservation of that world was a thing to be taken for granted, for it was the natural out-come of his whole previous existence.

A striking representative of the first type of hero is Fyodor Talanov in L. Leonov's *Invasion*. Talanov had committed a crime in his youth, was an inveterate drunkard and had, on the whole, made a muddle of his life, earning nothing but the distrust of his friends and near ones. In the play we find Talanov returning to the parental roof just at the time when the Soviet troops retreat from his home town and the Nazis occupy it. Scorned by his fellows, he nevertheless fights single-handed against a pack of fascists and dies the death of a hero inspired by the fact that by his heroism he has redeemed himself in the eyes of his fellow countrymen.

In *Russian People* by C. Simonov there are a number of characters representative of the second and more common type of hero in Soviet war drama—the man to whom to fight, and, if needs be, to die for his country and the Socialist way of life was as natural and logical as was his life of constructive effort before the war. In Captain Safonov, in *Russian People*, C. Simonov really develops further the character of Sergei Lukonin from *The Lad From Our Town*.

What is common to all the three characters—Platon Krechet, Sergei Lukonin and Captain Safonov—is a high moral sense. They have, to a certain degree, inherited the qualities of Guy in *My Friend* and have developed them more profoundly. Each of them is an expert in his own field, a man imbued with the creative spirit, and whose ultimate ideals and present morals are indissolubly connected.

In the later period of the war and directly following victory, this new hero of Soviet drama—intellectual, thinker, both expert and dreamer in his profession—emerges as a defender of the purity of principle, of a rigid, uncompromising attitude to questions of morality, even in small private matters. The chief characters in Alexander Kron's *Officer of the Fleet* and Boris Chirskov's *The Victors* give militant expression to the new level of Soviet morality.

Captain Gorbunov in *Officer of the Fleet*

is an apologist for the naval profession. To him moral integrity and high principles are important in every-day actions, as the least digression from one's principles is bound to make an officer vulnerable, undermine the authority without which it is impossible to be a true commander. And Gorbunov at all times abides by his principles with a singular consistency, that naturally causes clashes in his public duties and private life. What is characteristic of these clashes is Gorbunov's earnest desire to see his principles take deep root among the people who surround him. The consistent, honest and stubborn way in which he goes about, carrying his principles into life, makes him win out in the end in a very difficult situation and gain the support and acknowledgment of his comrades.

The position in which Colonel-General Muravyev in *The Victors* finds himself is a good deal more complicated, for his responsibilities are infinitely greater. He is in command of a front with several armies under him, and he must answer for the defence of a city, upon which, in many respects, the outcome of the war against the Nazis depends. And the stubbornness, perseverance and high principles displayed by him are inspired by great ideals and turn out to be a decisive factor in winning the day.

It is the same demand for moral integrity, devotion to ideals and principles that stands out in recent Soviet plays dealing with the Soviet youth whose first real experience of life was bound up with the war. A remarkable character in this respect is Zoya in Margarita Aligher's *Tale About Truth*. The character is drawn from real life—from Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya, posthumously made Hero of the Soviet Union, who was cruelly tortured and hanged by the fascists near Moscow, in 1941.

Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya had just reached her final grade at high school when the war broke out. With much difficulty she succeeded in having herself sworn into a partisan detachment and she fought behind the enemy's lines, on Nazi-held Soviet territory. She was the kind of Soviet youngster who from early childhood dreamed of performing great exploits for the good of the people. Brought up in the spirit of mutual assistance and respect for human dignity she could not help but loath deeply all that fascism represented. In her heroic character, moral integrity is combined with the sincerity and ardour of youth.

The development of the Soviet drama is determined by the search for the best and most perfect expression of the image of the present-day man. This search is in keeping with the progressive traditions of Russian classic art of the 19th century and the specific features of the development of the Russian theatre, marked by the desire to give the most profound and complete portrayal of the spiritual world of man in all its multifold variety and complexity.

In 1897 Leo Tolstoy wrote in his diary: "To the child everything is new and therefore the artistic impressions are numerous. To us, on the other hand, there is something new in the depth of feelings from which a man draws his separate individuality."

For thirty years the Soviet drama has been portraying the best manifestations of the new man, stressing the most perfect features of his individuality, as a gauge for society. The Soviet drama has always stressed the absolutely unique nature of each human personality, manifesting itself in the fight for the common happiness, for freedom and progress against the forces of reaction and oppression.

NIKOLAI OTTEN

Portrait of General Tutarinov — *C. Kitaika*

NEW BOOKS

A BIOGRAPHY OF A RUSSIAN STATESMAN

Alexander Sokolov. *Menshikov. Soviet Writer* Publishing House. Moscow. 308 pages.

Sokolov's book may be regarded as an original genre—while it is neither fiction nor an historical monography, it combines elements of both.

The narrative is based on historical documents. Sokolov called his book an *Historical Chronicle*, and dedicated it to Alexander Menshikov, the distinguished general and astute statesman who served under Peter the Great.

The epoch of Peter I has attracted the attention of many Soviet writers. Alexei Tolstoy's novel *Peter the Great*, for example, has gained great popularity. *Menshikov*, unlike Tolstoy's novel, is not an all-embracing epic representation of that period in Russia's history. It is a literary biography of Peter the Great's loyal follower and staunch supporter.

In describing the life of Alexander Menshikov, the author tells about the friendship that existed between the tsar and his orderly, who came of common stock and was unceremoniously addressed by his master as "Alexashka". He tells how in the course of the Nine-Year Russo-Swedish war Menshikov changed his sergeant's stripes for a field-marshal's baton, and became an august prince of Russia, rising from the humble position of a vendor of hot buns. The son of a stableman became the right hand of His Majesty, the Emperor of Russia.

The book starts with an account of how the tsar established intercourse with foreigners, residing at that time in Moscow, particularly, with François Jacques Lefort, a Swiss colonel in the Russian service.

In Lefort's house Peter noticed young Menshikov and took him into his service as his orderly. From that time on the fortune of the tsar and his orderly are bound up together. Throughout the years Menshikov fought side by side with Peter, following him through all major campaigns and battles.

Sokolov shows how the meteoric exaltation of the "tsar's and country's loyal subject" reflects the aggrandizement of the Russian empire, under the rule of Peter the Great.

The first march on Azov in 1695; the building of the Russian navy at Voronezh; the travels of Peter and Menshikov in Western Europe; the dispute for the Baltic countries which rightfully belonged to Russia; the Turkish campaign; the famous Poltava battle that brought defeat to the then mighty Swedish army—"a memorable event in history and a good lesson for later generations," according to the philosopher Leibnitz—these are the main stages of Menshikov's career, portraying him as one of the most brilliant strategists of his time.

The author gives considerable attention to the history of the creation of Russia's powerful military and commercial bastion on the uninhabited islands and deep marshes of the Baltic coast—St. Petersburg, the future capital of the country.

The honour of being the first governor-general of the new capital was bestowed upon Alexander Menshikov.

The fabulous rapidity of the growth of the city which became Peter's "window into Europe", is inseparably connected with Menshikov's activities in state affairs.

Menshikov, as depicted by Sokolov, is a man of rare audacity and enterprise, with a keen and resolute mind.

Having risen from the lower walks of life, and being connected with Peter I only by state services and not by noble birth, Menshikov maintained an ardent hatred for the reactionary boyars, who endeavoured to hinder Russia's progress. Consistently encouraging initiative in his statesmen, Peter I instructed them to act "upon their own judgement according to the turn of events."

In the eyes of Peter I the enterprising and ready-witted Menshikov was in this respect incomparably superior to other Russian statesmen. It is worth noting that many foreigners then living in Russia differed in their recognition of Menshikov's merits, being mostly blind to his military and other talents. This false opinion of Menshikov was shared by high-born Russian noblemen who had been removed from the government, and who were not likely to forget Menshikov's "mean birth"; nor could they possibly ignore the important role he played in the reformation of Russia and his contribution to the growth and development of her military and state power.

The slanderous insinuations of his enemies, however, were unable to shatter Menshikov's fame. His name in history is associated with that of Peter I.

The deeds and exploits of Menshikov and other eminent Russian military leaders, his companions-in-arms, such as Sheremetyev, Repnin and other "fledglings of Peter's nest" were honoured by posterity.

SELECTIONS FROM A JEWISH CLASSIC WRITER

David Bergelson. *Selected Works*. Translated into Russian State Publishing House *Der Emes*. Moscow. 397 pages.

David Bergélson is a distinguished Jewish writer of the modern school whose novels rank with the classics of Jewish literature.

Bergelson's books are a product of a life's close scrutiny of complex social relations.

His first short stories were published in the dark days of reaction that followed the defeat of the Russian revolution of 1905 and describe the life of the *nouveaux-riches* and their hangers-on in remote provincial towns, their cynical double dealing in human feelings and relations, stagnant traditions which corrupt the human soul. His works are permeated with bitter contempt for "petty shopkeepers", as Gorky called this group of society, and great compassion for his heroes, young people, hopelessly perishing in a contaminating and inhuman world.

In one of his best pre-revolutionary works *Mirele* (1910), the writer depicts the life and fate of Mirele, a girl from a "pauper aristocratic" family, whose youth is sold by her parents, marrying her off to the scion of a rich family in order to improve their financial status. Mirele longs for a happiness of her own, however small and pathetic, but in the long run, she surrenders to an inevitable fate, with all her desires thwarted and her hopes frustrated.

European critics draw a parallel between Bergelson's Mirele and Flaubert's Emma Bovary.

David Bergelson was born in the 90's of the last century in a provincial town of the Kiev district where he spent his boyhood and youth, and the impoverished Gurovitzes, the upstart Burnesses, Mireles, maimed by their upbringing and the truth-seeking students Libokesses, the heroes of his writings, were all familiar to him from his childhood days.

But all Bergelson's heroes, the humiliated and crippled miller (*The Deaf*), and his daughter, dishonoured by his employer's son and forced in the end to take her own life, the provincial student-democrats, the heartbroken Mirele—none of them was able to find a way out from the conditions imposed upon them by their environment.

And only after the October Revolution, as was appropriately pointed out by Isaak Dobrushin, critic and historian of Jewish literature, in his introduction to Bergelson's *Selected Works*, "did Bergelson find that his favourite heroes had at last come upon the right track, which he had so unavailingly sought for them throughout the years of his literary work."

In the obscurity of a provincial town Bergelson perceived the man of tomorrow in a toolmaker, Leiser, the son of the town doctor, who takes up arms in the struggle for his people's happiness. And in contrast Bergelson tells of a young man (*Eternal Slave*) who emigrated from tsarist Russia and returns as an "American tourist." He comes back with a bank account and with the notion that "a city without the rich is—how should one put it—like weekdays without a holiday."

But life in his native town had changed, the townsfolk were employed in honest labour and a life of social activity, and the rich, with whom he wanted to mingle, had disappeared without trace. And even the youngsters harkening to the "American wisdom" of the tourist jeered and taunted this spectre from another world.

It is only after the Revolution that Bergelson's heroes begin to comprehend social relations and deliberately bind their life with the interests of their liberated country.

Even their outward appearance has changed. His heroes now are "sturdy fellows" with "laughing eyes" like Happy Wind Velvell, foreman of a carpenter's brigade in the Soviet Autonomous Region of Birobijan, or the collective farmers, workers and builders —they are all people of labour. In yesterday's "apron-string kids," the writer discovers today a readiness for heroic deeds backed by selfless perseverence and great will power; and these newly-acquired inner qualities allow Godashvili, the Caucasian Jew of *In the Mountain Gorge*, to score a victory in unequal contest with the fascists in World War II.

The theme of the mutual friendship of the peoples is prominent in Bergelson's post-revolutionary stories.

This sentiment brings together a taciturn railwayman Makar and Meyer Shlain, an evacuée who settled down at a remote railway junction (*By the Light of the Fires*). Thanks to the thoughtful consideration of this Russian, who hides his feelings under a mask of unfriendliness—Meyer Shlain steps into a new life by the light of fires of the post-war construction works.

Bergelson's style of writing has always been distinguished by lyricism and profound and intricate psychological pattern.

A STUDY OF THE GREAT UKRAINIAN POET

Marietta Shaginyan. *Taras Shevchenko. State Literary Publishing House*. Moscow. 357 pages.

Marietta Shaginyan's biographical study of Taras Shevchenko is an astute analysis that sheds light, by means of a comprehensive research into archive materials, on hitherto vague episodes in the life of the great Ukrainian poet.

Excerpts from the letters and diaries of Shevchenko's friends and contemporaries, published now for the first time, reveal in a new light the poet's varied talents and interests.

Taras Shevchenko, a serf who obtained his freedom only in his mature years, always remained one of the people, tied body and soul with them not only spiritually but by the very circumstances of his life.

Dobrolyubov once aptly remarked: "The ideals and sympathies of Shevchenko were in perfect harmony with the thoughts and customs of the people."

Marietta Shaginyan gives a profound analysis of the poetic structure of the *Kobzar* and tells how Shevchenko uses the language of the people in his literary work.

The soft-spoken dialect of the Ukrainian villager, the concomitant of a simple rural life, becomes terse and cutting when dealing with the dramatic, social interplay of forces.

By applying the simplest mediums of style and expression, Taras Shevchenko achieves vivid literary generalization in portraying his heroes and their background.

As a lyricist Shevchenko does not confine himself to the expression of his emotional feelings; being a narrator in poetry, he produces a

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The section of criticism contains articles by I. Sats on the work of the Azerbaijan writer Mir Djalal; R. Fatuev on the poetry of the Daghestan poet Gamzat Tsadass; G. Puzis on the Lithuanian popular poet Julius Janonis; and notes on *Armenian Periodicals of the Past Century*.

REPORTAGE FROM THE GALLOWS

Julius Fučik. *Last Words Before Execution*. Translated from the Czech by Ju. Axel and T. Cheshikhina. *Foreign Literature Publishing House*. Moscow. 151 pages.

Five years have passed since the days with a description of which Fučik's book begins; not quite four years have passed since the author was executed in Berlin. Today, when voices in Western countries are clamouring for the past to be forgotten, Fučik's appeal to those who live to see the rout of fascism rings timely and true: "There is one thing I beg of you, who will survive these times, do not forget!"

Julius Fučik died at the age of forty. The son of a worker, he grew up in an industrial suburb; from his early childhood he loved music, literature and sport. He won literary fame by his clever, delicate essays on various art subjects. He began a novel but the fascists did not let him finish it. The chief feature in his biography was the revolutionary work to which he devoted his talent and his passion from early youth, and for which he later gave his life.

When the Hitlerites captured Czechoslovakia, Fučik hid in a village. There he wrote a clever book about Božena Nemcova, a Czech woman writer who 100 years ago had fought for women's rights. Before attacking the Soviet Union, the Hitlerites succeeded in discovering and capturing the leaders of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Upon that Julius Fučik became the editor of the Czech newspaper *Rude Pravo*, the central organ of the Czech Communists. On the eve of May 1st 1942, Fučik fell into the hands of the Gestapo. This marks the beginning of the events described in his book.

Fučik wrote the following about the Gestapo department for combating the Communists, in which he was imprisoned: "In 1942, the 'Four Hundred' was no longer called anything else but the 'Communist CC.' It underwent many changes, thousands and thousands of comrades, men and women, sat on its benches in their turn. But one thing did not change in it: the spirit of the collective, believing in victory. The 'Four Hundred' was a front-line trench, surrounded by the enemy on all sides, kept under incessant fire, but never for a moment thinking of surrender. Above it the red flag waved. Here the solidarity of the entire people, fighting for their liberation, manifested itself."

This torture chamber was staffed with picked executioners with the habits of cannibals and the customs of all sadists and monsters known to humanity. Refined methods of humiliating human dignity, physical and moral tortures were elaborated in this inferno in accordance with the most up-to-date achievements of technology. All who came here knew that the torment could only end in death, that "time was greedily devouring the last bits of my life." But in spite of that, Fučik's *Last Words Before Execution*, written in scraps between tortures, on the threshold of death, [1] is dedicated to active, creative, selfless and inexhaustible love of life. Fučik ends his bequest with the words: ". . . We lived for joy, for joy we went into battle, and for it we are dying. Therefore, never let grief be associated with our names. . . ."

These notes, written on the eve of death by one of the thousands of selfless fighters for human happiness have aroused the fervent admiration of readers in the country in which the entire people have been carrying the century-old dream of Communism into effect for nearly thirty years. The Soviet reader well understands the feeling of happiness in struggle and victory even on the threshold of death, the knowledge of a duty well done without a shade of vanity for the deed. Fučik leads the reader through a gallery of those "... who lived faithfully for the future and fell for it; these are figures carved in stone." Each one of these figures arouses in his contemporaries a profound admiration for that passionate, inspired, selfless and active life to which these heroes gave themselves utterly.

DICKENS IN RUSSIA

Charles Dickens. *Index of Most Important Literature in Russian Language (1838-1945)*. Compiled by Y. Friedlander. Editing and introduction by Professor M. Alexeyev. Published by Saltykov-Shchedrin State Public Library. Leningrad. 127 pages.

An index of the Russian translations of Dickens' main works and of the most important literature on Dickens published in the Russian language has been issued by the Saltykov-Shchedrin State Public Library in Leningrad. This index is part of a more comprehensive work on Dickens that is at present being compiled by the library. Special sections of the index are dedicated to Dickens' works adapted for the theatre and cinema and Dickens in Russian belle-lettres. The introduction by Professor M. P. Alexeyev, well-known expert on Anglo-Russian relations, cites a number of interesting quotations and facts from the history of Dickens' works in Russia.

Dostoyevsky wrote about the "world-wide responsiveness" of the Russians. "This Russian attitude to world literature is a phenomenon that has not been repeated to such a degree in other nations at any time in history." As the most striking illustration of this, Dostoyevsky referred to Dickens: "I am convinced that we understand Dickens in Russian almost as well as the English, his every shade of meaning, perhaps, and maybe we love him no less than do his countrymen." Indeed, the history of Dickens' works in

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[1] Fučik wrote his *Last Words Before Execution* secretly, in the Gestapo. Paper and pencil were provided by the guard. The latter also smuggled out the pages of the manuscript and hid them in various places. After the liberation of Czechoslovakia, Fučik's wife found and published them.

Cover for the book William Hogarth

from this article: "In Türkic poetry, a banner I did hoist, and master of this land I did become." (In those days the Uzbek language was known as Türkic.)

Of great interest is A. Boldyrev's work: *Ali Sher in Tales Told by His Contemporaries*. These tales, writes Boldyrev, "help us to resurrect what is most precious—the living image of a great man." The author has made use of the memoirs of the poet Vasufi and the famous historian Khrydemar, author of *The Book of Noble Qualities* dedicated to Nava'i, as well as a number of other ancient manuscripts.

The city of Herat, where Nava'i was born and spent the greater part of his life, reached the peak of its prosperity in the 15th century. According to Sultan Babur, the first Mogul emperor and one of Nava'i's contemporaries, in Herat "it was the aim and purpose of each man, engaged in any particular work, to bring this work to perfection." Calligraphy was a flourishing art. An article by A. Semenov: *Herat Calligraphy of the Epoch of Nava'i and Its Creators* describes extremely interesting samples of penmanship, the materials and colours used for them, the recipes and methods of their manufacture, and the artistic methods used. Semenov has drawn vivid pen pictures of a number of calligraphers of the epoch, such as Mir-Ali and the famous miniaturist Bekhzade, called the "Raphael of the Orient," of whom it was said that "he gave life to inanimate objects."

An interesting paper by A. Belenitsky, entitled *Historical Topography of Herat of the 15th Century* gives a vivid portrayal of this unique city, whose origin is lost in the depth of the centuries. After a short excursion into its early history, Belenitsky tells us in great detail about the location and beauties of the city in the 15th century, the materials used in its buildings, its fortifications, its suburbs and irrigation system. The author deals in particular detail with buildings, erected and restored in Nava'i's time.

NEW BOOKS ON WESTERN ARTISTS

A. Sidorov. *William Hogarth*. 24 pages.
A. Romm. *Auguste Rodin*. 43 pages.

Art Publishing House. Moscow-Leningrad.

Two short monographs, dedicated to William Hogarth, English painter and engraver of the 18th century, and Auguste Rodin, the 19th-century French sculptor, have been issued by the *Art* Publishing House.

The first comes from the pen of the art critic Alexei Sidorov, corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences. Sidorov gives a short pen portrait of the social conditions which helped to form Hogarth's art: "Together with Hogarth, the history and art of the British bourgeoisie appears on the scene. The latter placed the subject in art above all traditions. It demanded a moralizing, useful art. The British bourgeoisie of the first half of the 18th century were full of activity; they still had much to win in their own country, to strengthen their political standing. And as their weapon in literature and art they chose an active realism, lashingly satirical. Swift in literature and Hogarth in painting and engraving are the best representatives of that period."

The author shows us all the complex contradictions of Hogarth's career. Yet Hogarth was a man of strict principles, and his witty themes and fantastic transformations of the world, which concealed many satirical hints, promote this artist to the vanguard of the realistic art of the epoch of Enlightenment.

Having analyzed the satirical engravings of the master, the author proceeds to deal with Hogarth's paintings which form a special, particularly important part of his work. The lively detail and daring strokes of the brush, devoid of any academic "smoothness", make Hogarth's portraits the forerunners of the realistic portrait art of the 19th century.

In recent years a large number of books and articles on Rodin have appeared in Russia.

Alexander Romm's monograph draws an excellent pen picture of the artistic atmosphere in which Rodin's world outlook and his mode of expression were formed. The author describes how the personal misfortunes of the future sculptor merged with the profound social crisis preceding the revolution of 1871. The tragic conception of life is shown in Rodin's first works, particularly in *The Man With the Broken Nose* (1864). "This tragic mask is a prologue, as it were, to the grand poem about human suffering and the grandeur of the human spirit which Rodin was to create in the following years."

The centre of interest in the book is pivoted around the story of Rodin's *Citizens of Calais*

in which the problem of heroic art has been solved with brilliant daring in the genre of a complicated psychological drama.

The group of Rodin's later works (*The Wave*, *The Kiss*, *The Dawn*, and others) are distinguished by the delicate and intricate treatment of the plastic mass. This has caused many art critics to speak of Rodin's impressionism. Romm points to the essential differences which distinguish Rodin from the impressionists. While using some of their achievements—methods of picturesque modelling, increased attention to light and shade, contrasts between the rough and the polished parts of the work—Rodin is nevertheless far removed from the impressionists in the main thing: in the character of his images. "The impressionists," writes Romm, "registered fleeting, transient impressions. Rodin . . . sought to capture the sequence of the action portrayed, to show not only the present, but also the past and the future."

Rodin is one of the most popular sculptors among Soviet art lovers. Many of his best works—*Eve*, *The Man With the Key*, *The Citizens of Calais*, *Love Flees*, *Eternal Spring*, the busts of Hugo and Mahler—are preserved in Soviet museums. A number of eminent Soviet sculptors, including Mukhina, Golubkina, Merkurov and Nikoladze, are disciples of Rodin.

NEW TRANSLATIONS OF BERNARD SHAW

George Bernard Shaw. *Selected Works. State Literary Publishing House*. Moscow. 488 pages.

A volume of selected works by Bernard Shaw translated by O. Kholmskaya, N. Daruzes, N. Volzhina, M. Loric, and others, edited by R. Galperina, has been published by the *State Literary Publishing House*.

The volume opens with excerpts from Shaw's own introduction to his *Unpleasant Plays—Chiefly About Myself*.

The following plays are included, representing different periods of Shaw's work: *Widower's Houset*, *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, *Candida*, *The Devil's Disciple*, *Caesar and Cleopatra*, *John Bull's Other Island*, *How He Lied to Her Husband*, *Major Barbara*, *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*, *Pygmalion*, *Heartbreak House*, *Augustus Does His Bit*, *Too True to Be Good*, *Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles*.

The illustrations for the book are by M. Pikov.

ARTS

STAGE DESIGN

In the new type of theatre which developed in Soviet times, the scenic designer ranks as a co-author of the production. And his creative participation in the moulding of theatrical ideas hardly knows precedent in the long history of stagecraft.

The Soviet theatre's profound approach to the contents of the play, the embodiment of the play's substance and meaning in the whole production and not in the actor's art alone, evoked a new form of collaboration between the producer and the scenic designer, which left its mark on the entire culture of the Soviet theatre.

Whereas the dramatist establishes a direct link between the theatre and life, the producer strives to achieve unity *within* the production with the aid of the sundry forms of stage expression at his disposal. An identical task confronts the designer who, on a par with the producer, is responsible for the production as a whole.

Throughout its development the Soviet theatre has fostered a sense of responsibility in the scenic artist and has made him take his place as creator of the production, the equal of the producer and the cast, instead of merely confining himself to executive functions. At the same time it demanded that the choice of a décor artist be intrinsically in keeping with the play, the play's spirit and the esthetic credo of the given company.

There is a widespread fallacy that we are, for the most part, indebted to the constructivists for criticism of the old way of mounting a play. Innovations in stage scenery, however, did not at all originate with the constructivists. The proscenium arch and the painted wings had, indeed, come to be regarded as obsolete long before the advent of constructivism in the theatre.

Already in the early nineties two distinctly opposite tendencies could be discerned amidst the debates raging at the time around questions of décor and scenery.

Exponents of the decadent, formalistic view embraced the following principle—"not the dramatic piece makes the stage scene but the stage scene—the dramatic piece. . . ."

By uprooting the old stage forms the decadents hoped to pave the way for a revision of the ideological position of the realistic theatre, to erect a barrier against the incursion of life into art and against the life-giving dramaturgy of Chekhov and Gorky. A common front against realism was what united all the advocates of the "theatre of symbols", of the theory of the "theatricalization of the theatre" and the theory of the existence of definite "theatrical" epochs in the history of mankind, as well as all the champions of the conventional theatre.

Thus, while the decadents strove to disintegrate the theatre, the truly progressive elements in theatrical art endeavoured in every way to preserve the unity and integrity of the theatre. At the same time, the latter also denounced the old traditional system of stage design, for they saw how sorely inadequate it was from the point of view of artistic truth, the false chord it struck in the new drama, the constraint it put on the possibilities of the theatre. This is, for example, what A. Lensky, an eminent Russian actor and producer, wrote in 1901: "the spectator has an irrevocable right *to demand illusionistic effects* in all he sees on the stage; painting in the theatre is merely part of a complicated organism creating the unity of the production. The painted scene is not to be regarded as a thing apart but as standing in relation to the piece for which it was painted." Lensky also claimed that the proscenium arch had outlived its age.

"How is one to reconcile," he asks, "the living figure of the actor, the real objects that surround him with the 'impression given by a painted canvas?' How can the artist be so light-minded about the use of false line and perspective, about things which actually shatter his decorative concept!" Though Lensky declared war on the old forms of stage design, unlike the decadents, he did not wish to violate the integrity of the theatrical production as such. To him literature was the foundation of scenic art and he urged a revision of stage design precisely in the interests of literature, for the sake of the unity of the production and the consummate portrayal of life on the stage.

Lensky's view is but one of many examples indicating that the time for a revision of the old system of stage design was ripe long before the advent of the constructivists who merely developed this revision and went to extremes in doing so.

During the transition period in the history of the Soviet theatre when it endeavoured to convey the spirit of the new revolutionary era—at a time when the Soviet play as such had not yet appeared and the style of the new theatre was still in an embryonic stage—the constructivists held particular sway. However, much as many Soviet theatre people were taken in by constructivist ideas, these ideas were not really able to exert a potent influence on the course of the Soviet art. Constructivism was not consonant with the basic principles and tendencies of the Soviet theatre, which saw its mission in the creation of a genuinely popular scenic art.

Nevertheless, this goal was not achieved without a certain faltering on the way. It

was, indeed, in the flurry of constant search, of the lance-breaking of various trends, of the struggle for overcoming the influences of the bourgeois theatre and its conventional formalistic tendencies, that the new Soviet style was born.

Various events in the life of the Soviet theatre led to the new, most effective use of the stage design. Already in the very early years following the Revolution, the so-called academic theatres began to pay much attention to the culture of the production as a whole. The Maly Theatre was commissioning some of the country's leading painters, engravers and architects—Constantine Yuon, Mikhail Dobujinsky, Vladimir Shchuko, Dmitri Kardovsky—to design the settings for the Russian and Western classics.

At the same time the destinies of stage design were guided by such young artists as Georgi Yakulov, Isaak Rabinovich, Vladimir Dmitriev, Boris Erdman. They brought with them their own dreams of the theatre, their own ideas of interpreting dramatic action, and the romantic urge was strongly felt in their contribution to the style of the stage design of those days.

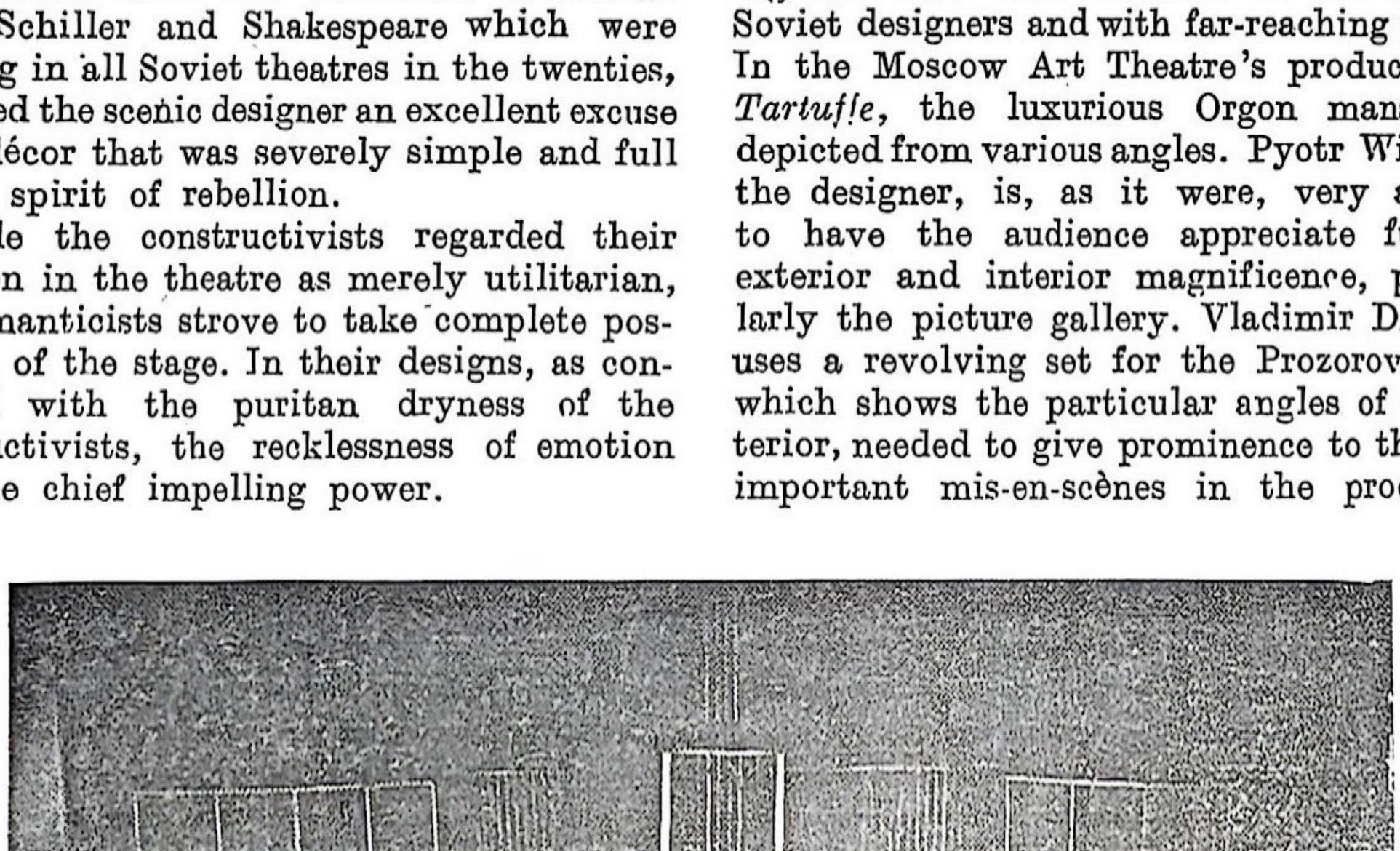
In their designs the "romanticists" made use of the usual motifs of "left" painting and graphic art. Broken lines, sharp angles, knocked out of place and proportion by the catastrophic chaos of architectural forms, jarring colours and sharply discordant textures—all gave the impression of newly aroused life, so different from the diffidence of former days. Schiller and Shakespeare which were showing in all Soviet theatres in the twenties, provided the scenic designer an excellent excuse for a décor that was severely simple and full of the spirit of rebellion.

While the constructivists regarded their function in the theatre as merely utilitarian, the romanticists strove to take complete possession of the stage. In their designs, as contrasted with the puritan dryness of the constructivists, the recklessness of emotion was the chief impelling power.

Gradually, however, the differences between the two generations of designers are obliterated. And a tendency common to both becomes more and more clearly defined: *the abstract set*, the framework of objects, simplified along constructivist lines is replaced by *the architectural set*, far more effective in reproducing the scene of action.

Also, new important elements penetrate the very composition of the production. The designer and producer now desire to achieve "movement" in the scenery. A milepost in this respect were Isaak Rabinovich's sets for *Lysistratus* (1925) in the Moscow Art Theatre. In them we witness the transition from *static* architectural décor to the *dynamic* design. The white, semi-circular pillars, staircases and platforms, set against a blue background of the sky, all these revolving sets, executed in a free-hand manner with plenty of space, gave ample opportunity for sprightly mis-en-scènes and helped the cast to capture the rhythm of Aristophanes' impetuous comedy. Alexander Golovin, in his sets for *The Marriage of Figaro*, also produced in the Art Theatre, took the next step forward. As the stage slowly revolves, it reveals to the spectator all the nooks and corners of a miniature labyrinth in a park with its three-dimensional boskets, fountains and bowers. And the festive air with which the whole revolving set is imbued goes well with the music and spirit of the production.

The possibilities afforded by the revolving set were later realized to the full by Soviet designers and with far-reaching results. In the Moscow Art Theatre's production of *Tartuffe*, the luxurious Orgon mansion is depicted from various angles. Pyotr Williams, the designer, is, as it were, very anxious to have the audience appreciate fully its exterior and interior magnificence, particularly the picture gallery. Vladimir Dmitriev uses a revolving set for the Prozorov house, which shows the particular angles of the interior, needed to give prominence to the most important mis-en-scènes in the production



Décor to Mayakovsky's The Bug *by A. Rodchenko*

of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* at the Moscow Art Theatre. This was not simply the designer's way of solving his particular problem, but was rather an expression of style, wherein the concept of the producer was happily wedded to that of the designer.

It was a conventionality which *fortified* rather than *undermined* the illusion created by the stage, that the revolving set brought to the theatre. The static type of set which had reigned supreme for a long period obviously fell short of giving a broad, effective picture of the scene of action. In their attempt to overcome the restrictions of the old type of set, scenic designers resorted to various means. One of these was the combination set in which a street may serve both as a street and house, the interior being merged with the exterior, architectural fragments with interior furnishings. A tall tenement house, for example, would be slit open to bring the action of the play to its various interiors. In such combined static sets the natural relation between objects was bound to be disturbed and an unwholesome conventionality, based on a fragmentary representation of the scene of action and necessary properties, was permitted to flourish.

No sooner had the revolving architectural set appeared than the advantages of a swift change of décor became only too obvious. The audience now received an unbroken impression of the scene of action. Moreover, it appeared that a change of décor with the curtain open actually strengthened the impression of reality and helped to produce the illusion of continuous action.

For obvious reasons the new sets were particularly suited to the modern play. Early Soviet plays were rarely confined to a few interior scenes. As a rule they were made up of many episodes, often of a contrasting character—all prompted by the new conflicts which the dramatist strove to reflect in his work. Moreover, the dramatist's attention was now focused on social upheavals and the civic life and relations of his heroes rather than their private affairs and intimate emotions. Thus the scene of action changed as well, and the designer was now occupied with reproducing factory shops, battlefields, warships, city squares filled with the commotion of eager, roused throngs of people. Plays teaming with action, crammed in time and space, made the revolving set important not only as an effective means of swiftly changing the décor, but proved that the very principle of the revolving scenes was perfectly suited to the inexorable demands put forward by the new comedy and drama.

Such plays as Vladimir Bill-Belotserkovsky's *Storm*, Vsevolod Ivanov's *Armoured Train 14-69*, Constantine Trenyov's *Lyubov Yarovaya* and Boris Lavrenev's *Break-Up* did not only make history in Soviet drama. They gave new direction to the whole life of the theatre and influenced the forms of stage design. True enough, designers have not willingly relinquished their penchant for vivid colourful sets in the conventional manner which the classic plays permitted them to indulge in and continued for a long time to regard them as more advantageous for displaying their artistic temperament and feeling for style. However, they were soon to realize that it was the less spectacular modern play which was gradually to give rise to new forms, forms which took possession of the whole realm of theatrical art, penetrating all fields and genres.

Each period in the life of the theatre has had its own fixed rules regarding the representation of history and contemporary life on the stage, its own principle of dressing up the heroes of the day in the garments of past periods, or, on the contrary, of making historical personages act in the contemporary milieu. The only theatre, indeed, which needs no historical masquerade to expound its ideas is the Soviet theatre. It is equally averse to a sociologically vulgarized and grotesquely exaggerated "modernization" of classic plays and to an inert acceptance of old stage canons in producing contemporary plays. During the first two decades of its existence the Soviet theatre battled against both these tendencies. And in winning that battle the new Soviet drama played a decisive role. It is clear, therefore, why the new type of stage scenery first took its place in Soviet plays, though at first it would seem that these afforded less scope to the artist's imagination.

What proved an important step forward in the Soviet theatre's general march towards new theatrical forms was the Art Theatre's production of *Armoured Train* (in 1927). Victor Simov's stage design for this play was patterned along simple, monumental, extremely expressive lines in which he aimed at showing the scene of action as a whole and happily avoided fragmentary representation. In this play the scenes of action were uncommon—the platform of an armoured train, a locomotive depot, a railway line, the slanting roof of a village church. In a firmly knit, realistic and expressive pattern the designer was able to convey the spiritual elation of the times. "Emphasis on detail won't do here, it must give way to a manipulation of large planes," the designer wrote of his concept. "The stern times, the roused life, the elated spirit—let it all stand out from a severe convincing background."

Victor Simov, a designer of the psychological theatre, feels that background perfectly, as only a keen observer of life can. And to depict it he uses only those of the new forms which are essential to bring out his idea. The belfry and village church represented by only a pitch of the roof—a slanting platform for the actors to perform on—a background of an overcast sky and a wide stretch of fields and woods, suggested rather than shown by the backdrop; a high railway embankment, at the foot of which one of the most tragic episodes of the play is enacted; an approaching light and a momentary blackout as the train rumbles by; the steel of the quick-firing cannon in the steel-clad compartment of the armoured train—in these compelling scenes of rigid simplicity the artist, indeed, manipulated with "whole periods of history". And what looks out from his sets is the new life born out of grim strife and not the fragile world of Chekhov's country villas, the waning spirit of which Simov captured so well in his preceding work.

On the other hand, in the early years of

the Soviet theatre, some designers fell into the temptation of "beautifying" the classics by giving them a picturesque and ornate setting. Pyotr Williams, for example, some time before the premiere of the *Governor-General* at the Vakhtangov Theatre thought it necessary to declare to the public that in Gogol's comedy "as distinguished from previous productions, the scene would be laid in various rooms." In the Maly Theatre's production of *Wtt Works Woe* Evgeni Lanseret presented a detailed view of the durable and ponderous architecture of the Famusov mansion. His was a masterful and flawless excursion into the past—his sets leading us now into the drawing and portrait rooms, now into the galleried ballroom with the guests bidding farewell on the imposing staircase and the liveried servants lighting the chandeliers and later extinguishing them in the final scene. However, while in this production the Moscow of Famusov's time was brought vividly to life by the designer's powers of imagination, Chatsky, its fervent accuser, was lost in the commotion of the ballroom.

In the thirties the approach to the classic play is one of infinite care. The designer recreates faithfully the spirit of the epoch, adorning his sets with period furniture that is true to style, making splendid sketches for character make-up and costumes. But the producer will now and then fail to give proper perspective to the hero of the play amidst all the splendour and colour with which the designer endows the performance. Thus comes a period of stage designs, magnificent when judged on their own merits, and productions in which the artist, notwithstanding his personal talent, suffers defeat on a par with the producer. His defeat, however, is an honourable one. What prompted these over-magnificent sets was the wholesome demand for a full-blooded realistic recreation of life on the stage. Their justification lay in their revolt against the sketchy, formalistic distortion of the classics and, moreover, they bore out the fact that stage design was successfully shedding the old stereotypes.

The first two decades of the life of the Soviet theatre saw three types of stage design succeed each other. First to become popular was the bare constructivist set. This was followed by the architectural set, while in the thirties the majority of the playhouses adopted the combined painted and architectural design. Of the latter we find a series of noteworthy examples in some of the productions of the pre-war seasons. What is evident from the evolution of decorative forms in the theatre is that it is governed by the same law underlying the development of the Soviet theatre in general—bringing the theatre *closer to life* and giving greater and greater prominence to *the realistic interpretation of the scene of action.*

The most effective type of combined painted and architectural design was at once the most flexible, complicated and capacious. This type of set gave the artist ample opportunity for self-expression. It was applicable to any one of the genres of the theatre and could be easily modified to fit in with the producer's concept, whenever necessary. With the revival of the painted scene there began a period of revision of all the basic principles of decorative painting.

And very soon two methods of applying painting to the stage design took shape: painting as a means for decorating the stage and painting as an instrument for transforming the stage by creating an illusion of space. In this respect Vladimir Favorsky's and Pyotr Williams' stage designs bore an almost militant character. After a long period of preference for tangible objects and three-dimensional architectural forms the designer began to fill the stage with canvases in which he demonstrated his own artistic individuality.

In *Twelfth Night* (1st Studio of the Moscow Art Theatre) Vladimir Favorsky suspended his painted canvases from gilt columns. From the point of view of traditional stage design, this was a sort of set with movable screens. Shakespeare's heroes proceeded to live in a kind of toy world; with a wave of the hand they turned the front of a house into a curtain, their movements played havoc with the painted makeshift panels which constituted the décor. The artist did not trouble to keep up the illusion. Rather he endeavoured to dispel it in every way, making the actors stand out against the background of the dwarfed houses, squeezed out into the periphery of the stage. In this way the houses, mountains, trees and the furnishings were reduced to the function of mere properties of which the actor was in full command. Even the painted wings were merely an illustration to the scene of action and across the sky depicted on the canvas ran a streamer on which "Illyria" was inscribed. Here it was the designer's idea to endow each of his decorative pieces with a twofold existence—first as an invention and second as a real object. The actor enters a house by simply drawing aside the drapery on which the house is painted and then hides behind a screen representing a tree. He acts in surroundings produced by poetic imagination and makes it clear enough to the audience that the sets are a mere excuse for his antics in the manner of the improvised theatre.

In Nisson Shifrin's sets for pre-war productions of Shakespeare the draperies, tapestries and improvised likenesses of real objects predominate. Tow, tulle, and birchbark combined with plywood, are what the artist uses for his bijou nature scene in *As You Like It*. There are the merry-go-round horses upon which Petruchio and Katherina seem to gallop about in *The Taming of the Shrew*, old shaggy logs transformed into woodland elves, heaps of mouldy leaves turned to life and a good deal of other fantastic transformations more in the spirit of Maeterlinck than Shakespeare in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

And behind Alexander Tyshler's work—his basket-shaped house in *Fuente Ovejuna*, the palace in *King Lear*, designed like a folding casket, the padded effect of the fortress walls and of the warrior's coats of mail in *Richard III* is the same principle as underlies Vladimir Favorsky's slim columns and detachable screens.

At one time it was Nikolai Akimov's most cherished dream to achieve such expression in a stage object that "one would not be ashamed to place it side by side with a good

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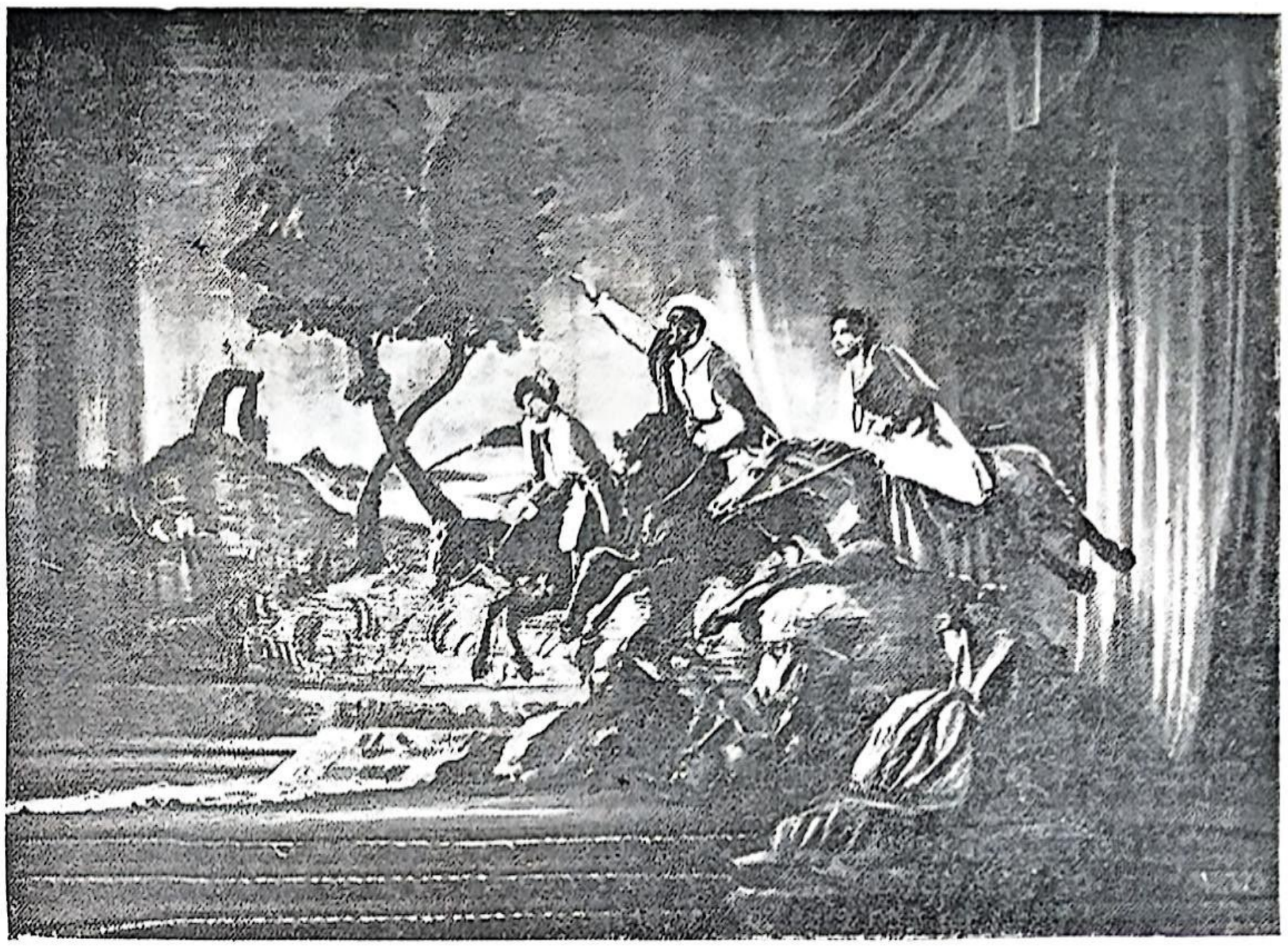


Décor to Shakespeare's Taming of the Shrew *by N. Shifrin*

actor." To Tyshler this was no dream but something quite real and practicable as far as problems of stage design went.

However, the idea of achieving maximum expressiveness in one stage object is bound at all times to clash with the general idea of the set as a whole. Such an object has its own part to "play" regardless of the actor. It demands the attention due to a solo performer. And all that surrounds it is but a background for it—and whether that background be neutral or arresting in colour makes not the slightest difference.

There may, however, be a different approach, wherein not the plastic, three-dimensional object but the painted background dominates the set. A good illustration of this are the sets with which Pyotr Williams made his debut as stage designer. In his sets for the *Pickwick Club* Williams introduces a backdrop with caricatures of the play's characters. What he has in mind in doing so becomes evident in the prologue when the corresponding actors stick their heads through slits in the canvas. Williams embarks on an independent illustration of Dickens. As though wishing to outdo the actors he improvises on his own, peopling his painted scenes with supplementary characters who live a life quite apart, in the two-dimensional world created by the designer.

Thus arise three different principles of harmonizing the actor with his background, of presenting decorative environment and human activity, of combining properties and painted scenic design. Quite consciously Vladimir Favorsky *juxtaposes* the graphic image to the tangible object and the living form of the actor. However, as the action proceeds contradictions fade away: an ordinary drop turns into a picture of a Renaissance palazzo or vice versa. Nisson Shifrin, when he uses a city view painted on a drapery to represent Padua, in the *Taming of the Shrew*, chooses the same principle.

Alexander Tyshler, on the other hand, uses all the means at his disposal to stress the unity of the actor and the stage properties. In his work a painted canvas will never clash with the living actor. There is really no scenery, no background, in the conventional sense of the word, in the work he does. To him the costumes and the sets are a means for forming a single plastic image.

This principle of *identifying* the stage property with the human actor is brought out very consistently in *Richard III*. Here identical material and method—padded cotton—are used to indicate the brick wall of a medieval castle and the coats of mail of the warriors who storm it.

Designs by Pyotr Williams are frankly eclectic. While making painting live in its own right on the stage, he does not think it necessary to bother much about the actor. His deepest concern is to have Dickens illustrated with a maximum expressiveness in his large canvases which lord it over the stage. In the *Pickwick Club* the clash between the painting and the sculptural forms is carried to an extreme. The prison scene, for example, is dominated by a large canvas with a number of figures painted on it, whereas inconspicuously, in a far corner a cell made of plywood and twigs catches the eye. In it the real Mr. Pickwick and not his painted double indulges in tragi-comic tirades.

Despite differences of taste, talent, method of interpretation and use of painting, graphic art and sculpture, Favorsky, Shifrin, Tyshler and Williams all have this in common—they are designers of a transition style. What proves this, in the first place and quite conclusively, is a *subjective reworking* of all the properties and artistic forms which go to make up the designer's set. Second and no

less important proof of this is a *renunciation of the illusionistic* in favour of art panels. The actor, properties and painted scenes come to enjoy equal status in the production, their relations to each other are translated into the simplest terms. The idea is to have the play mounted on the stage and not to transform the stage by the media of design. The principles of stage design outlined above still govern the sets of a number of productions of classic and modern plays showing today. Typical examples are *Tanya* in the Theatre of the Revolution, *Silver Gorge* in the Central Theatre of the Soviet Army and nearly all of the productions of the Realistic Theatre. Here nature scenes, scenes of action, interiors are all represented by streamers, screens and projectors; partitions separated by three-dimensional trees, cliffs, etc., at times carried beyond the conventional boundaries of the stage and brought on to the portal.

Soon enough, learning from his experience, the scenic designer became convinced of the inadequacy of the method of "decorating the stage," when confronted with the solution of fundamental problems in the life of the theatre. It is one thing to conform to style, to improvise Nature, to display ingenuity and be admirably conversant with stage possibilities and quite another thing to create the theatrical forms most effective for embodying the idea of the play and for making the stage design correspond to the credo of the particular theatre. And it is painting that is the principal means of doing it. In his painting of the scenes the designer will somehow or other strive towards something bigger than just the copying of real objects.

The first essential of the actor's art is the power of self-transformation. The designer's primary task is to *transform the stage*—to build up an illusion which would make the audience forget the restrictions that a "box" of just so much floorspace puts on the action. In this way the designer comes into the *closest contact with the actor*. He tries to give personality to every bit of space on the stage, to create atmosphere, to bring spiritual elation to the scenes, and originality to the painting.

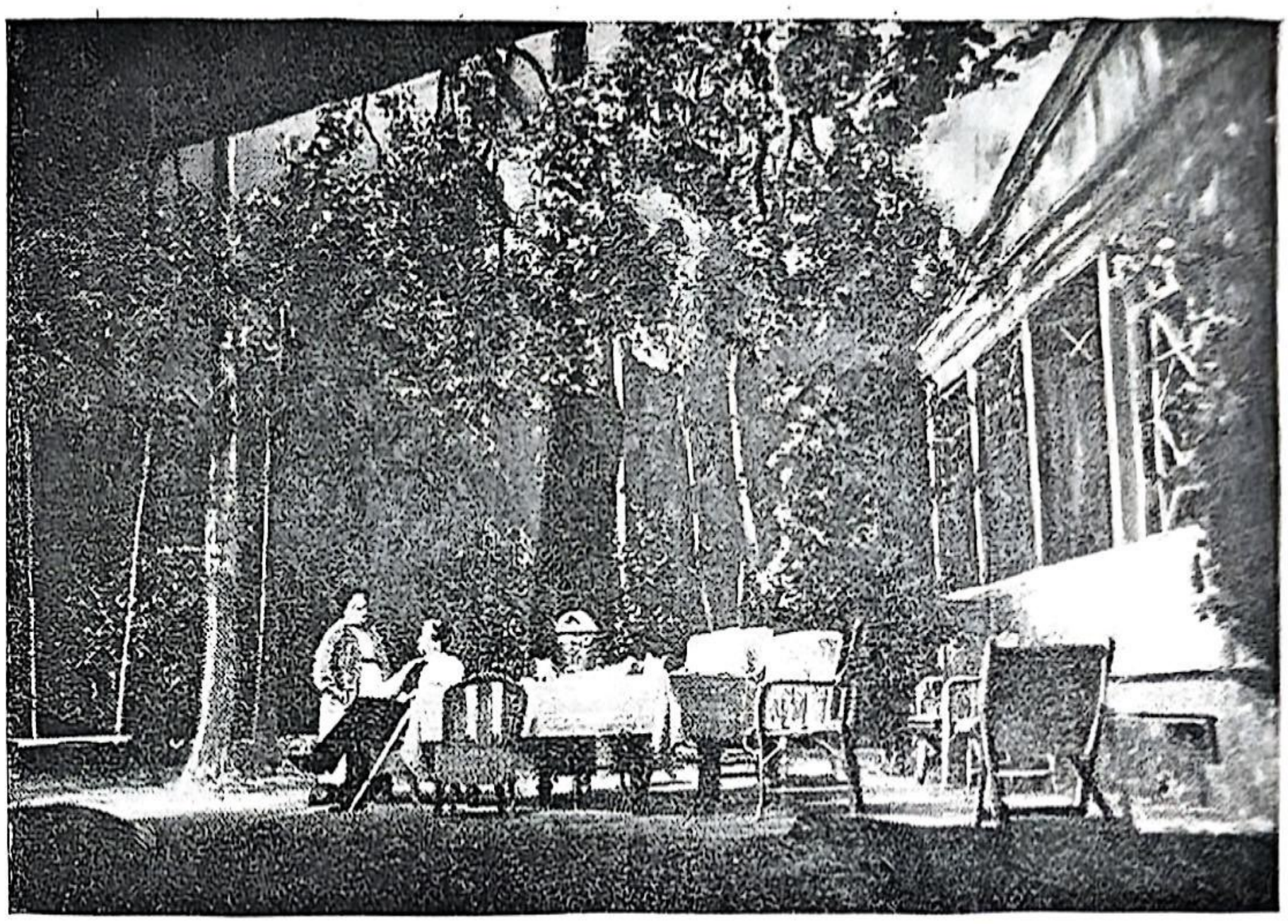
It would be wrong to force the designer to create new optical effects, panoramas and dioramas. Were this at all necessary, then surely the screen with its infinitely greater powers for producing illusion, would be enthroned on the stage set. However, the inadequacy of the screen is made only all too evident by the actor's art as well as by the contrast of the intangibility of the effects it produces with the real space and objects surrounding the live actor on the stage.

And, indeed, so compelling was the demand for a tangible realism in the stage pattern that by the end of the thirties nearly all of the Soviet scenic designers declared themselves partisans of illusionistic scenery in which painting was combined with sculpture. Among them were such diverse artists as Fyodor Fedorovsky and Isaak Rabinovich, Pyotr Williams and Nikolai Akimov, Boris Volkov and Jakov Shtoffer.

In an article such as this, space does not permit of an analysis of the work of individual designers. Therefore I have confined myself to an outline of the evolution of the new type of Soviet stage design. However, one need but compare Isaak Rabinovich's settings for *Fuente Ovejuna* (1920) or *Don Carlos* with his own design for *Evgeni Onegin* in which the scenery is realistic and imbued with poetic spirit, to appreciate the great changes wrought in stage design in the course of the last thirty years. There are quite a different spirit and a different language of design in Victor Simov's pre-revolutionary settings for Chekhov's plays and his work for *The Armoured Train* or *Dead Souls*; in Nisson Shifrin's conventional sets for Shakespeare's plays and his landscape backdrops, executed freely almost in the manner of an étude, for a *Tale About Truth*, produced in the Central Theatre of the Soviet Army, in 1947. Even in Pyotr Williams we perceive a change with each new design. His Spanish sets for *Don Quixote* at the Vakhtangov Theatre in no way recall the flat, decorative tableaux of the *Pickwick Club* and the recent première of the *Victors* in the Moscow Art Theatre introduces a different Williams, now a master of illusionistic scenery.

In the progress which Vladimir Dmitriev has made in his sets the evolution of the whole of stage design is particularly obvious. In his time he had been enamoured of constructivism, urbanism and expressionism. This is borne out by his settings for Verhaeren's *Les Aubes*, Ernst Toller's *The Unhappy Eugene*, and others. The same designer's later sets—*Queen of Spades*, *Three Sisters*, *Man With a Gun*, *Kremlin Chimes*, *The Last Sacrifice*—are full-blooded realistic designs. Dmitriev's "modest" sets with their subdued pictorial effects are all the more powerful because they express so well the producer's concept. His choice of media is at all times subordinated to the idea of the performance as a whole. This is particularly obvious in the winter set for the *Queen of Spades*, the final scene in *Three Sisters*, and the figure of Lenin with the light falling on it in the *Kremlin Chimes*. In the first instance, the designer makes use of the vanishing line of perspective in his architectural set, in the second, he achieves a tragic effect by a contrast of black costumes and white birch stumps, in the third, he resorts to light effects as a means for emphasizing that which is most important in the décor. Isaak Rabinovich and Vladimir Tatlin regard stage lighting as the most effective means of uniting the composition of the scene. Vladimir Dmitriev was one of the first to reclaim the beauty of a play of colours for the stage. Fyodor Fedorovsky uses the beauty and dramatic power of colour effects for his monumental sets for opera productions in grand style. Whatever differences of approach there may exist among all these artists, they have a common aim—to reproduce life as authentically and convincingly as possible on the stage.

During the Patriotic War, Soviet designers were engaged chiefly in making sets for contemporary plays—*Front*, *Russian People*, *Invasion*, and others. These plays were particularly effective in making the designer more deeply aware than ever of his blood bond with life and with the people. The recent resolutions of the Central Committee of the



Décor to Chekhov's Uncle Vanya *by V. Dmitriev*

Communist Party of the Soviet Union on questions of art once again lay stress on what is most important in the development of modern art—a feeling for the times, ideology, a profound interpretation of character and consummate form.

Throughout the development of Soviet decorative art the gift for momentous, independent generalizations, which in the theatre must go hand in hand with the wisdom of self-restriction for the benefit of the spectator, was fostered in the Soviet designers. "For many years now I have been trying most assiduously to hit on a set of a 'conventionally-simplified' design which would bring home the 'kernel' of the play and not overshadow the actors," Vladimir Dmitriev writes in one of his articles.

Nor is the scenic designer of today drawn towards painting stage pictures possessing an independent life of their own. To him it is far more important to bring out in each separate scene and in the whole set the "kernel" of the play, to capture the spirit of the action and the characters within the *time element*. And this makes him subdue himself in one case and give full power to his artistic support of the cast in another.

In this connection the question arises of what the theatre must choose for its subject matter and this actuallyboils down to the direction art must now take. The representation of the "incidental" and "fleeting", which in its time played so important a part in the psychological theatre, is no longer the object of the artist's seekings. Nor is he satisfied with the architectural set, successfully as it has been worked out in the Soviet theatre, capable of the most subtle and faithful recreation of period but nonetheless monotonous in its effect on the audience. Thus today the art of Evgeni Lanseret, Pyotr Williams and other masters who produced amazing samples of fundamental, life-size sets, is supplanted by a more developed and intricate realistic style guided by the principle that the artist must choose for his décor that feature, which is most important, typical and essential for the action of the play.

An appraisal of the path traversed by Soviet stage design in the last thirty years brings out the significance of the contribution made by Soviet designers to the world theatre. At each successive stage in their development they created highly original designs and at the same time proceeded successfully along the direction mapped out by the general development of the new art of Socialist realism.

ALFRED BASSEKHES

NEWS AND VIEWS

LITERATURE

LITERARY INSTITUTE OF UNION OF SOVIET WRITERS

The Literary Institute, maintained by the Union of Soviet Writers, gives future poets and writers a good liberal education, a good grounding in philosophy and also offers them professional training.

The institute was founded in 1933 on the initiative of Maxim Gorky, who gave much of his time to the education of young writers. Among its graduates are the poets Constantine Simonov, Evgeni Dolmatovsky, Mikhail Matusovsky, Margarita Aligher, the satirists Alexander Raskin and Maurice Sloboskoy, the critics Daniil Danin, Lyudmila Skorino, and many others.

The conditions for enrollment call for full secondary school education and the presentation of work showing literary ability. An applicant can present either verse or prose that has been published or he may submit them in manuscript. A special commission of eminent authors selects the future students. Competition for enrollment is keen since the institute admits only thirty students annually and the total student body is about 100.

The institute's curriculum includes the usual university courses in the history of literature and the social sciences and economics. Some of the best authorities on literature of both ancient and modern times lecture at the institute. The course of classical Greek and Roman literature is read by Professor Sergei Radtsig, eminent expert and translator. The history of modern West-European literature is taught by Professor Metallov; the history of Russian literature by Professor Pospelov; history of esthetics by Professor Asmus. A course on West-European culture (music, painting, architecture, theatre, etc.) is read by Professor Guber.

In addition to the general lectures there are special courses where the students obtain a more profound and detailed knowledge of Russian and West-European literature. These seminars are guided by prominent literary scholars. Kornei Chukovsky leads a seminar on the work of the poet Nekrasov, a course of prosody is taught by Professor Bondi, and there is a general course of lectures on the translation of belles-lettres read by the well-known translator Neustadt.

One of the aims of the institute is to develop a taste for the language of the classics of Russian literature. A cycle of lectures and seminars on philology lays stress on the analysis of the classics.

The general lectures and seminars are augmented by special individual studies. Every student is assigned a consultant, usually a writer of renown. For example, C. Fedin, C. Paustovsky, L. Leonov, and others guide the studies of prose writers, while V. Lugovskoy, P. Antokolsky and M. Golodny have poets under their wing.

These consultants are chosen with a view to the natural bent of the student. For example, students who show ability for romantic writing are assigned to Constantine Paustovsky, those who strive for psychological portrayal to Leonid Leonov, etc.

The task of the consultant is not easy: without imposing his tastes and literary style on the student, without overwhelming him with his authority, he tries to direct his efforts, help develop his talents and perfect his technique. The consultant helps his students draw up his plans and goes over his drafts and ready work. The consultant analyzes with him every line of his writing, every character, every situation and detail of the plot.

When a student finishes his work he presents it at a special seminar which again is conducted by a professional writer. Such seminars usually number ten regular participants but any student is free to attend them.

A work discussed at a seminar is read in advance by one or two official opponents, also students. Discussions are usually very lively and after all sides have been heard, the leader of the seminar sums up, giving an appraisal of the work under consideration and the views expressed during the debate. The analysis given at these seminars is very exhaustive and covers not only the ideological content and plot but also the characters, style and language.

The Union of Soviet Writers arranges frequent Saturday evening gatherings of students where well-known authors read unpublished works, at times even their draft manuscripts, speak of their plans, and describe their technique. Sometimes these gatherings resolve into evenings of reminiscences.

Students are also given the opportunity of meeting poets or authors who write in languages other than Russian. On such occasions the authors read their works in their native language and are followed by their translators. At one of these gatherings the Ukrainian poet Pervomaisky read some of his verses in his native tongue; they were then recited in Russian translation by Margarita Aligher and Mikhail Golodny, the translators.

Almost all the students of the institute were at the front or fought in guerrilla detachments, many of them gaining distinction in battle. Nikolai Evdokimov, Victor Urin, Joseph Dick, and others returned to the institute after being severely wounded.

The student body includes people of many nationalities. One of the students is an Ossetian girl whose plays are already being produced in her native region; there are two literary critics from Georgia, a young novelist from Lithuania, and others.

In addition to the stipend received by all students of the institute, there are nineteen special scholarships awarded to students who excel in all subjects.

MUSIC

NOTES ON MUSIC

A *Slavonic Rhapsody* is the latest addition to the list of new works Nikolai Myaskovsky has made known to the public this year. The others are his 25th Symphony, sonata for piano and violin and several vocal cycles. According to the composer, ancient folk melodies of the 16th century he himself has discovered, were utilized for the rhapsody which he wrote in the summer of 1946.

While it is not a monumental work and has no pretensions to philosophical profundity, the rhapsody, nevertheless, reflects the general tendencies manifested in the works of Myaskovsky in recent years; the renunciation of former modernistic extravagances in style, greater affinity with the line of Russian classical music, represented by Chaikovsky and Taneyev, and growing ties with the Russian folk melos.

The composer has not published a program of his new composition but the different parts of the rhapsody seem to form a chain of musical sketches of the people's life. The folklore themes of the *Slavonic Rhapsody* and its entire manner of exposition emphasize its national character.

The latest production of the Bolshoi Opera Theatre is *The Hostile Force*, an opera written by Alexander Serov (1820-1871), famed Russian musicologist and composer. A legal expert by education, Serov gained renown for his studies of Mozart, Spontini, Meyerbeer, Glinka and Dargomyzhsky and of Wagner, whose passionate admirer he became in the fifties. Having received no special musical education and learning, as he himself put it, "from the scores of the great masters," Serov tried his hand at composition. He scored as a composer with his opera *Judith*, produced in St. Petersburg in 1863. Next came the opera *Rogneda*, written on a theme from the history of Kiev Rus, and also acclaimed by the public. Sudden death cut short the life of the composer when he was finishing *The Hostile Force*. The fifth act of the opera was at the time orchestrated by his pupil Nikolai Solovyov and the opera was first presented in St. Petersburg in 1871. For the recent production by the Moscow Bolshoi Theatre the new version of Act V was done by Boris Asafyev.

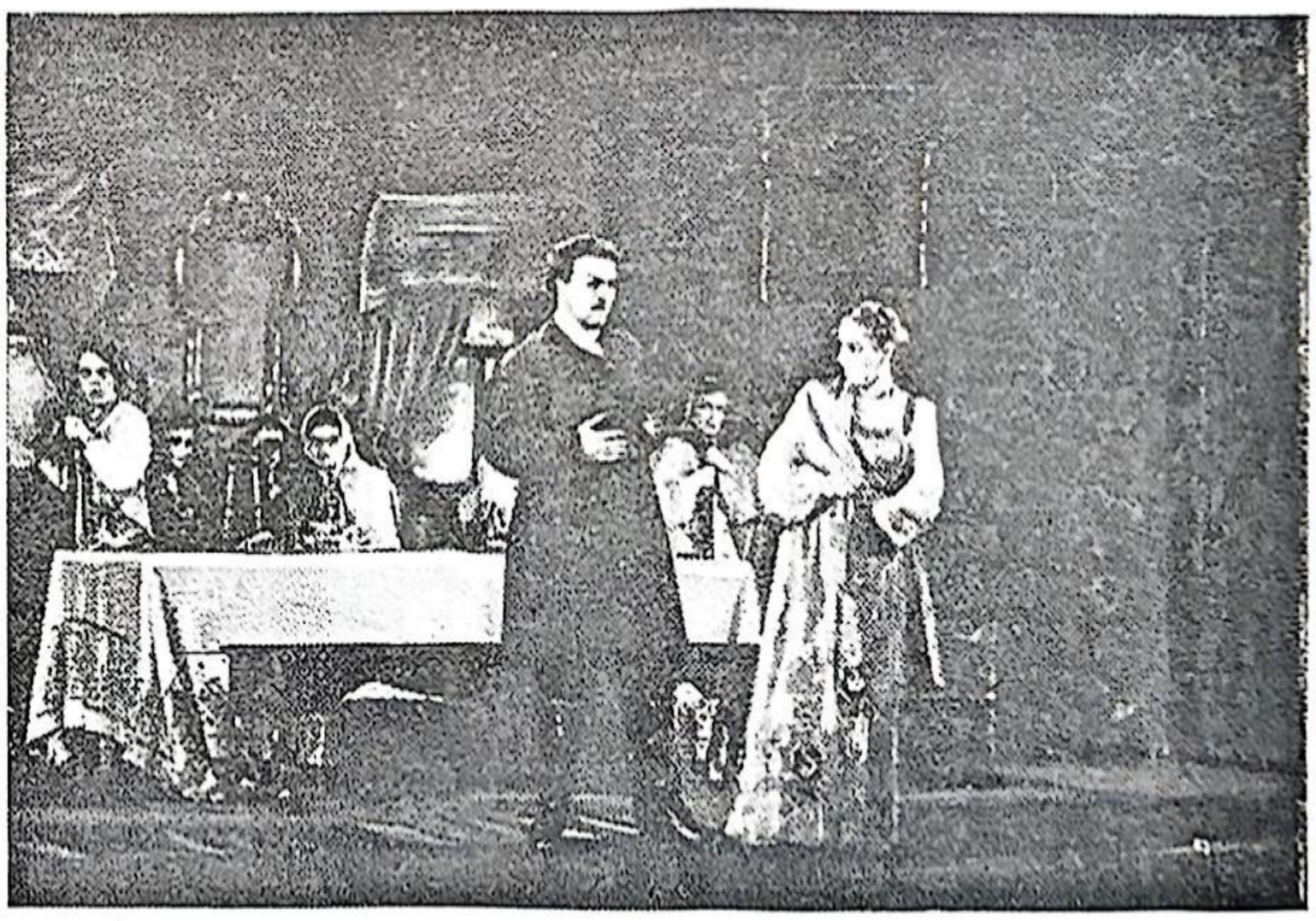
The opera is based on a play by Ostrovsky, dealing with the life of the merchants in the Russian provinces of a day gone by. Discarding any pomposity in the opera, Serov wished it to be full of "simple and profound dramatic force." The opera for a long time held a place of honour in the Russian opera repertoire. Fyodor Chaliapin was inimitable in the role of Yeryomka, the smith. Later, however, Serov's music was to be relegated to the background by such titans of Russian music as Borodin, Mussorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov and Chaikovsky.

The revival of *The Hostile Force* is merited tribute to the composer and is regarded as an important event in Soviet musical life.

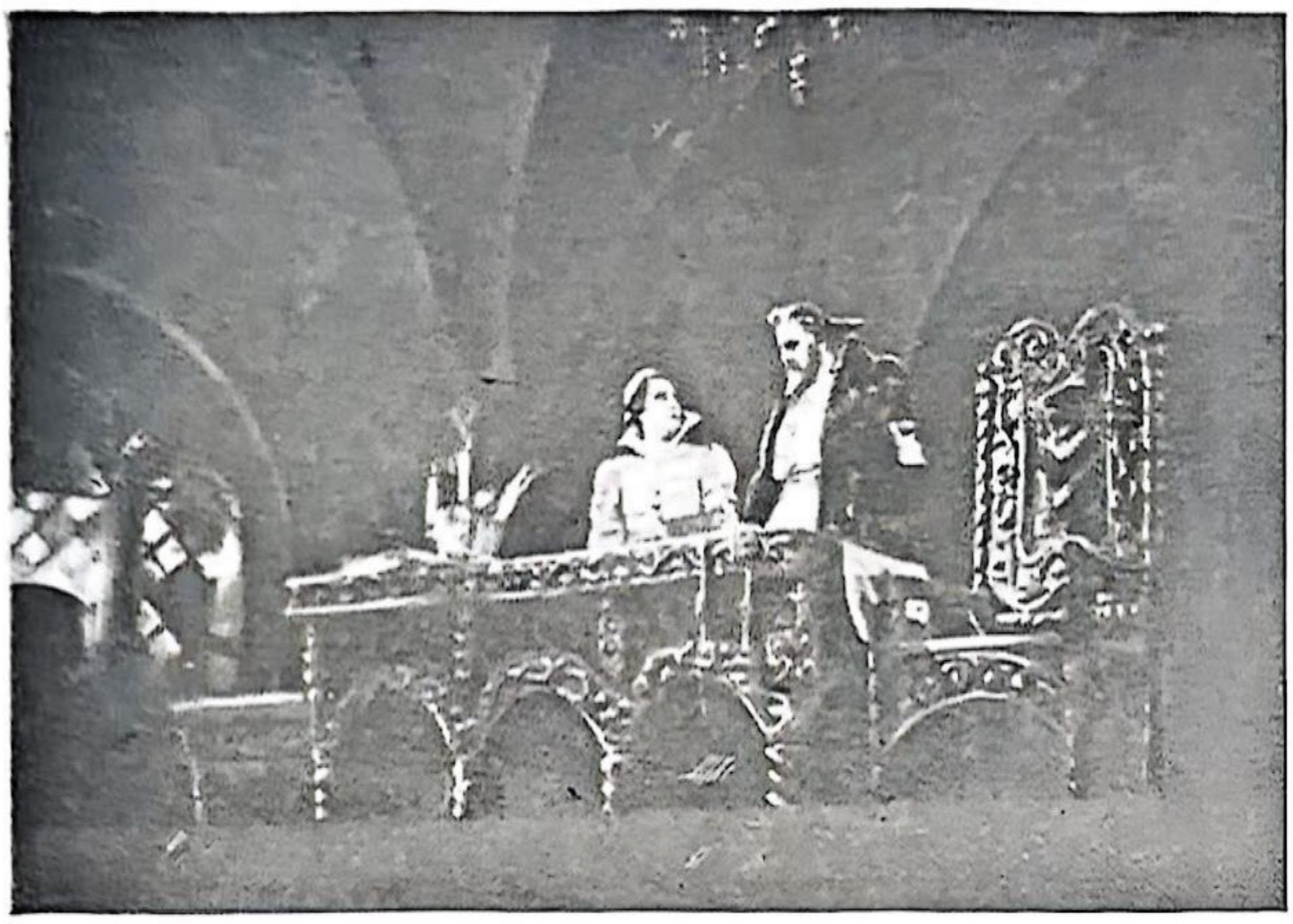
Several performances of Bach's *High Mass* were heard at the Moscow Conservatory before the close of the season. Taking part in these concerts, conducted by Alexander Gauk, were the State Symphony Orchestra and the Leningrad Academic Capella, which has been in existence for more than 200 years. Some of the finest singers of Moscow appeared as soloists.

During the past season Moscow heard such monumental works as Händel's *Samson* Oratorio, Berlioz's *Requiem*, Purcell's opera *Dido and Aeneas* and Cherubini's *Requiem in C-minor*. The repertoire for the coming season will include Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*.

An interesting cycle of symphony concerts organized jointly by the Union of Soviet Composers and the Moscow Philharmonic featured new works by Soviet composers. Much favourable comment was elicited by the Second Piano Concerto of Andrei Balanchivadze, gifted Georgian composer, the colourful *Armenian Rhapsody* of Sergei Balasanian, the Fifth Symphony of the young Latvian composer Janis Ivanov, the First Symphony of Nikolai Peiko, pupil of Myaskovsky, a Stalin Prize winner of 1946.



The Hostile Force. *Scene from Act II*



Boris Godunov. *Scene from Act III*

Admission to such concerts is free and their organization demands a big outlay of funds, since the works performed have not yet been published and copies have to be made from the composer's score. All these expenses are covered by the Music Fund, an organization functioning under the Union of Soviet Composers, whose goal is to foster the development of music. The budget of the Music Fund, made up from royalties it receives from concerts, amounts to 25 million rubles in the current year. The Music Fund has its own publishing house, it builds homes for composers and also maintains special country homes where musicians can get full accommodations and also have the necessary quiet and seclusion. Composers themselves pay only 50 per cent of the cost of accommodations at these Houses of Creative Endeavour, as they are called, the rest being covered by the Music Fund.

THEATRE

RUSSIAN THEATRICAL SOCIETY HOLDS IBSEN SESSION

A special session dedicated to Henrik Ibsen and the presentation of his plays on the old Russian and Soviet stage was arranged by the Russian Theatrical Society in Moscow.

Sponsored by the Shakespeare and West-European Drama Department of the Society, the session was attended by actors, playwrights and literary scholars of Moscow and other cities.

The session was opened by the reading of a paper on Ibsen and the Soviet theatre by the critic E. Surkov. People's Artist P. Gaideburov recalled his participation in the production of Ibsen's *Ghosts* in St. Petersburg in 1904, People's Artist S. Giatsintova, who several years ago produced *Nora* at the Moscow Lenin Komsomol Theatre and played the leading part, told of her work on that role.

The session also heard papers on Ibsen as the master of realistic drama and an analysis of his productions both on the old Russian stage and by Soviet theatres.

A feature of the session was the performance of excerpts from Ibsen's plays by several celebrated actors and actresses, as well as a rendition of Grieg's music.

REVIVAL OF BORIS GODUNOV, *AT MOSCOW BOLSHOI OPERA THEATRE*

After an interval of many years the Moscow Bolshoi Theatre revived the production of Mussorgsky's opera *Boris Godunov*. The opera is presented in the version edited by Rimsky-Korsakov during Mussorgsky's lifetime with the addition of the scene at St. Basil's Cathedral which was subsequently orchestrated by Ippolitov-Ivanov.

Some of the best singers of the Bolshoi Theatre are taking part in the new production: Alexander Pirogov and Mark Reisen (Tsar Boris), Nikandr Khanayev (Pseudo-Demitri), Maria Maksakova and Vera Davydova (Marina Mniszek), Maxim Mikhailov (Pimen). The chorus was enlarged to 180 voices. The theatre's workshops have prepared nearly 1,000 costumes, which reproduce in detail the dress of the 16th century, while the sets by artist Fyodor Fyodorovsky bring to the stage the 16th-century Russia.

The theatre worked for two years on the opera and its presentation is regarded as one of the highlights of the season. Critics, however, find that the interpretation is not fully in keeping with the spirit of the composer who conceived the opera in the nature of a broad canvas of Russian life with the people as the main hero. The theatre, it is claimed, has laid too much emphasis on the personal tragedy of Tsar Boris.

Rightly regarded as one of the greatest chef d'oeuvres of the Russian musical genius, *Boris Godunov* had an unusual history. In December 1869, after sixteen months of intensive work, in the course of which the composer made a thorough study of the epoch, Mussorgsky completed the first version of the opera (seven scenes). By the summer of 1870 the score was orchestrated and presented to the management of the imperial theatres which found it to be unsuitable. The composer reworked the score. The second version, with nine scenes, was again submitted to the management in 1872 and the verdict was the same as before. It was

only on the insistent demand of the singers that three scenes from *Boris Godunov* were presented at St. Petersburg in February 1873. This production proved so successful that the management was finally persuaded to stage it in full and the première performance of the opera was given in January 1874.

Some of Russia's best singers, including Fyodor Chaliapin have appeared in the title role.

NEW GEORGIAN BALLET PRESENTED

Sinatle (Light) is the title of a new ballet by Grigori Kiladze presented recently in Tbilisi, capital of Soviet Georgia. It is a tale of the youth Avtandil who fought the forces of darkness and brought light, the symbol of liberty, joy and happiness, to his people.

Ballet master Vakhtang Chebukiani, who directed the new production, supplemented classical dances with picturesque and original Georgian folk dances. He also appears in the title role in which he excels both as an artist and virtuoso.

CINEMA

CINEMA ACTORS HAVE THEIR OWN THEATRE

One of Moscow's latest theatres has no counterpart in any other country in the world, both for its casts and style of production. This unique playhouse is the Cinema Actor's Theatre which counts among its cast several hundred screen actors employed in the various film studios of Moscow, including many of the country's celebrated film stars.

The productions of the new theatre are also unique since they are, one might say, in the nature of rehearsals for coming movie productions. Before shooting a new film the cast rehearses and then the different episodes are mounted into a theatrical performance, designed to give the audience a general conception of the setting and the action. These theatrical productions are presented in stage form only a dozen or so times, since their main purpose is to get the reactions of a real audience to the treatment of the theme and to the acting. Any shortcomings which may be disclosed are then rectified during the shooting of the film.

The Cinema Actor's Theatre counts among its cast members of studios directed by Mikhail Romm, Sergei Yutkevich, Sergei Gerasimov, Ivan Pyryev and Yuli Raizman. Each studio also has several young producers who work under the guidance of these older men with established reputation.

In addition to its importance as a testing ground for the cinema, the new theatre also introduces some innovations in histrionic art. The requirements of the cinema dictate the selection of actors to conform with the physical attributes of the characters they are to portray and this gives a sense of greater reality and exactness than in the legitimate theatre. Also the demand for realism results in the absence of any elements of convention and theatrical illusion.

The first two new productions by the Cinema Actor's Theatre—Mikhail Svetlov's *Brandenburg Gates* staged by Boris Babochkin and Alexander Fadeyev's *The Young Guard* staged by Sergei Gerasimov—evoked considerable interest. Forthcoming productions are Constantine Simonov's the *Russian Question* and Pavel Furmansky's *Tale of the Irrepressible*.

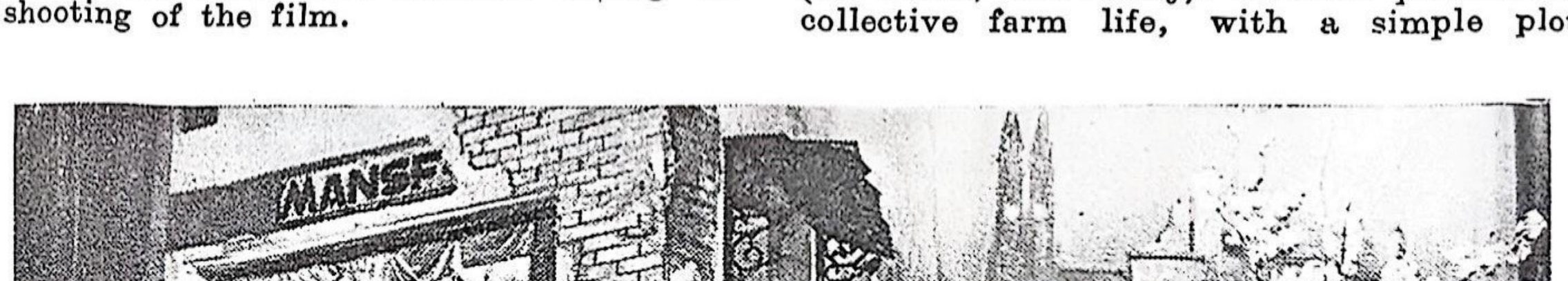
MISCELLANEOUS

BOOKS FOR CHILDREN AND ARTISTS WHO ILLUSTRATE THEM

The importance of the artist who illustrates books for the growing generation was vividly brought out at the recent exhibition arranged by the *Children's Publishing House*. Practically all the best graphic artists of the U. S. S. R. were among the illustrators of the books on display, which ranged from nursery rhymes to voluminous popular science books, adventure stories and the classics.

The artist who works on a book for children has a demanding and entrancing task—to capture the imagination of the child and unfold the world to him, step by step, in living, realistic images.

This world appears in child-like primitiveness in the clear, laconic drawings of M. Ushakova to Barto's *New Toys*. The sharp dynamic movement of life is well conveyed in the expressive and inimitable drawings of V. Goryayev (A. Barto, *The Swing*). Faithful pictures of collective farm life, with a simple plot



Brandenburg Gates, *staged by the Cinema Actor's Theatre*

Illustration to the fairy tale. By E. Tcharushin

revealing the close ties of men and animals with Nature, are given in the large book-albums by the renowned artist A. Plastov (*The Four Seasons on a Collective Farm*, *Domestic Animals*). The process of the gradual transformation of a pine tree into a polished table (S. Marshak's *Where Tables Come From*) is shown with much ingenuity and poesy by V. Lebedev, one of the most popular artists specializing in books for children. In his illustrations of the *Colour Book* (text by S. Marshak) one colour dominates on each page and the drawings are designed to awaken the sense of the esthetic in the child and enhance his perception of the world.

The section on imaginative scientific literature shows very clearly the striving of the publishers to supplement education at school by rationally organized reading and in this way contribute to the child's all-round development. V. Konashevich's illustrations for the *Magic Horn* lead the young reader into a circle of rather complex problems contained in this unusual mathematical encyclopedia. The artist obtains these results by making his drawings entertaining and ingenious, but at the same time, lucid and true to life.

Together with popular scientific books the publishing house issued fairy tales, illustrated by K. Kuznetsov, Y. Vasnetsov, V. Konashevich and others. Through the fantastic element in the best of these illustrations one discerns reality and through the fairy-tale metaphor sparkles the popular wisdom and life's experience, which the people have gained through the centuries.

The central hall of the exhibition was devoted to classical literature. Excellent old illustrations were used for a number of 1946 editions. Among these are Gogol's *Dead Souls* (artist A. Agin), Lermontov's *The Lay of Merchant Kalashnikov* (artist V. Vasnetsov) and Pushkin's fairy tales (illustrated by I. Bilibin). But for most of the classic works the illustrations were done by contemporary artists on special commissions from the publishing house. Outstanding among these is the work of E. Kibrik (Gogol's *Taras Bulba*). The large full-page lithographs done in a vigorous realistic manner concentrate attention on the characters, presenting them in the romantic aureole of lofty patriotic struggle. Begun before the war, these illustrations to a book written more than a century ago are presented as a contemporary interpretation of the immortal epic of the people's fight for freedom.

B. Dekhtyarev's illustrations to Gorky's *Childhood* are the crowning point of many years of effort to recreate the characters of this great Russian writer. Dekhtyarev is noted for his painstaking interpretation of the text, careful attention to the special features of the period and knowledge of that provincial mode of life in the stifling atmosphere of which the future great writer was suffocating and from which he escaped by a miracle.

Among the illustrations to foreign classics one of the first places is held by V. Goryayev. With great ability and temperament he creates the image of Tom Sawyer for juvenile readers. Most of the illustrations to the classics are done in a realistic vein. Though they know the life of the epoch and the trend of art in those days, as a rule, the artists avoid giving an imitation of the style of that period. On the contrary, they strive to bring to the reader whatever content there is in the text that has a general human appeal, and to make him grasp the essence of the epoch, even though it may be removed decades or even centuries from our day.

Perhaps the most important task of the artist working for the growing generation is that of illustrating books on modern themes. Alexander Fadeyev's novel *The Young Guard* brings the juvenile reader in contact with the most complex and burning problems of our times, helping young readers appreciate the noble and beautiful fate of Oleg Koshevoy and making them determined to be as fine as he was. In illustrating this book A. Shcheglov tried to preserve a photographic likeness to the heroes of Krasnodon and, at the same time, has selected the most sharp and tense situations in the novel.

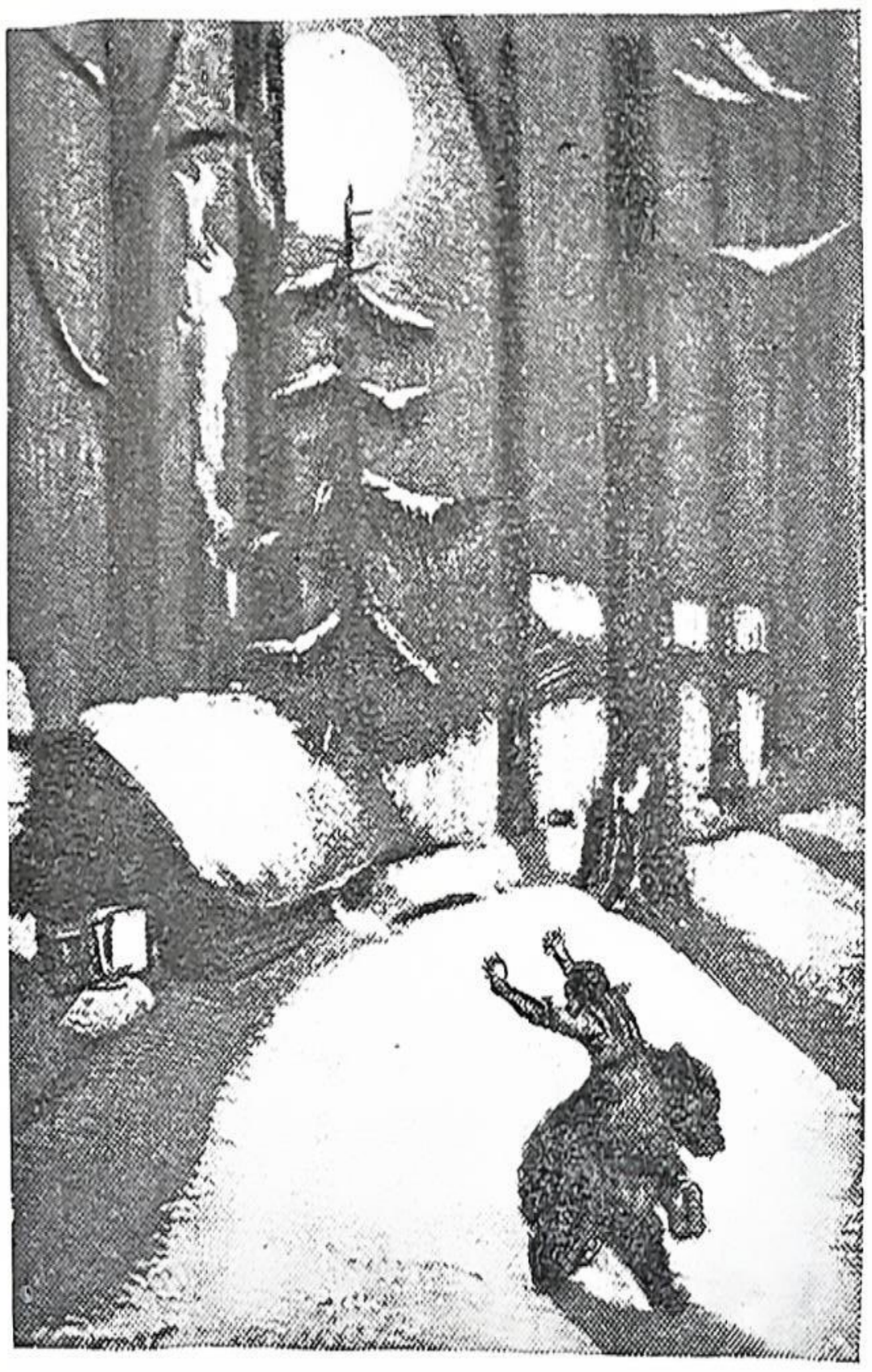


Illustration to the fairy tale. By K. Kuznetsov

During the war N. Pakhomov made a whole series of excellent drawings which forcefully depict the life of the people of Leningrad during the siege. Reproduced in the book-album *In Those Days* (text by N. Tikhonov) these lithographs acquaint children with the suffering the people had to endure and their staunchness in the face of every hardship.

LENINGRAD PALACE OF PIONEERS OBSERVES TENTH ANNIVERSARY

What has happened to former palaces? This is a question foreign visitors frequently ask. For the most part palaces have been converted into museums. Country homes of the tsar now house sanatoriums open to the people. There is, however, one former palatial home in Leningrad still known as a Palace. It is the Palace of Pioneers.

Ten years ago the former Anichkov Palace was turned into the biggest and most luxurious children's centre in the country. Here a schoolboy or girl can engage in any form of amateur art, technical hobby or sport he or she could desire. The Palace boasts of a splendid technical department with a wealth of various apparatus and devices where youngsters can try their hand at aircraft model making, the construction of electrical and radio apparatus, building of miniature vessels, etc.

There are special premises for budding artists, studios where enthusiastic followers of dramatics, music or dancing can rehearse. Sports and chess also figure prominently on the program of the Palace's activities. Some 11,000 children regularly attend its various circles. In addition, a large number of other children attend its lectures and performances. Total attendance in the past ten years exceeded eight and a half million.

Helping in the educational activity of the Palace are eminent people in different spheres. Among its lecturers are renowned scientists and writers. Famous actors and singers give concerts at the Palace or guide the activities of amateur groups.

Scientific institutes also lend a hand by helping to arrange various contests in which not only members of the Palace circles but all schoolchildren of Leningrad take part. Contests of young physicists, chemists, mathematicians, geographers and historians have become a regular feature. The geography contest held last year was in the nature of an imaginary trip from Leningrad to the Far East via the Great Northern Sea Route. Participants were asked to keep diaries, make notes of their "observations" during the trip, etc. The winners have been taken this summer on a real trip to the Arctic.

The ship room in the Leningrad Palace of Pioneers

Editor-in-chief: ALEXANDER KARAGANOV